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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

January 15, 1896.

No. 899.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXX.



OR, HOT HUSTLING FOR THE

MAN IN GRAY.

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TECTIVE," "PLUNGER PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STUBBORN AVENGER.

THE detective paused on the street corner. He had important work to do that night, but had far less zeal for work than usual, which was strange, noted as he was for just that quality. Whatever he undertook was done

"THAT'S THE MAN!" EXCLAIMED THEODORE, RETREATING FROM THE WINDOW.

with swift devotion to duty that had rendered him famous on the detective force.

"The Double-Quick Detective" was the sobriquet long since bestowed upon him by the public and by the force, and though he smiled in amusement when he heard the term used, he continued to merit it.

Now he looked around seriously as he stood on the corner.

"I feel oppressed, to-night," he murmured. "It is as if some calamity were impending. The very air seems full of threatening dangers, though I know not what they are. My task of the night is imperative, or I would not touch it while feeling thus. Shall I make a total failure of it? Bah! this is folly! I have laughed at others for their weak belief in omens and invisible troubles. I will not yield to the nonsensical worriment myself. I'll go on, and the result will show that my fears are all moonshine."

He was about to pass on, when he caught sight of another man moving along the block, which was deserted but for the presence of those two persons.

The movements of the second man were by no means steady and accurate, and though he did not really stagger, there was a suggestion of too much drink aboard in his carriage.

Detective Alexander Leland saw more than this, however, and he looked keenly for a moment, and then started slightly.

"It's Theodore!" he murmured.

There was no pleasure over the discovery manifested in his manner, though, in truth, he was governed more by regret at seeing the second man's condition than by sight of him there. He waited, and Theodore came nearer slowly.

The latter, giving no heed to his surroundings, was close to Alexander before he noticed him at all. When he did he stopped abruptly, and seemed to grow confused.

"You here!" he muttered.

"Yes, Theodore," was the quiet response. "What are you doing?"

"Walking."

"Why?"

"For exercise."

"You have done more than walk. You have been drinking."

Theodore's eyes fell; he looked at the sidewalk for a moment and then glanced up abruptly.

"What can you expect?" he demanded, sullenly.

"Whatever I expect, I do not like this. Your condition—"

"Oh! you have talked of that a full hundred times."

It was a complaining rather than an angry response, and the detective made answer with equal moderation.

"As far as I am concerned, I would willingly talk another hundred if it would do any good. You are my brother, and I do not like to see you going the way you are. It is not just to yourself nor to our family name."

"I admit it all. Until I came on the scene the Lelands were an honorable family. If they had weaknesses I don't know of the fact. I am willing to believe they were honorable in all ways. Some bad blood must have percolated through my hide, somehow. I am not worthy of the name; I am a good-for-nothing. True, there is no crime to be charged against me, but I am a scapegrace, a never-do-well and a hard drinker. I am a disgrace to the honored detective who is cursed by being weighted down by such a brother."

Gloomy was the long speech, but Alexander replied with patient kindness:

"We will not consider myself. Let us think only of the family name, and of your own situation."

"I could do something in the world if I had money," exclaimed Theodore, excitedly.

"Then go and make it."

"You know that if we had our due we should not need to try and make something out of nothing. We should have the money that Elias Warrington stole from our father."

The Double-Quick Detective sighed.

"Still thinking of that?"

"I think of it always."

"Better drop it, Theodore. It is an ignis fatuus; we shall never see the color of the money. Elias Warrington has it tied up in his bags and he will keep it tight, rest assured."

"The man is a scoundrel of the worst sort!" cried Theodore, his voice ringing with increased vehemence. "He should be made to disgorge his ill-gotten gains."

Alexander shook his head with gravity as marked as was his brother's outbreak.

"Why persist in thinking of that, Theodore?"

"How can I help it? Has he not stolen our birthright? Did he not wrong our father out of his fortune?"

"That is an old subject."

"It never will grow old with me!" exclaimed Theodore. "Our father had money. We always knew that. He had enough to send us, mere boys that we were, to a good preparatory school, and it was his intention to add a collegiate education to the preliminary. He said he had the money and would give us a good start in life."

"He was a good parent!" sighed the detective.

"He visited us at school," pursued Theodore, in his intense manner, "and he stated that he never had seen his financial prospects so bright. You remember his words. He told us both that he had handed his cash over to Elias Warrington to use in trade, and that, within a few months, it was sure to add a third to itself."

"Vain hope!"

"Why was it vain? Did not Warrington steal the money?"

"We believe he did; we never could prove it."

"Our father left us at the school, and he was as happy as we were. In less than a month we had news of his death. We returned to New York to find him buried. We found no more; we did not find our inheritance, nor any sign of it. We thought—we knew that Elias Warrington had stolen it from us."

"We could not prove it."

"The failure was complete."

"We were mere boys—I, but eighteen; you, two years younger."

"And we found no promissory note or other paper to show that our father had loaned, or in any way handed money, to Warrington."

"Our father was a poor hand at business methods."

"True; and though we realized that Warrington might have stolen a note or other paper, we also thought it possible that there never was a note."

"What does it matter? We have lost the small fortune due us."

"Lost it? I am not so sure of that. I have not given up. We made our search for our inheritance when we were boys. Warrington always denied all knowledge of our property, and declared he had received nothing from our father. We know he lied. Our father told us he had invested with old Elias, and Edward Leland was as truthful as man could be. We knew that Warrington lied."

The Double-Quick Detective looked at the time by his watch.

"Why discuss this, Theodore?" he asked, mildly. "We have talked of it time and again; we have seen Warrington both before and since we became of age. He denies that he ever had a penny of the Leland money, and we can't prove it. Why dwell upon it?"

"I am going to see him again."

"Useless!"

"I will show him that I am not to be trifled with."

"The law demands evidence."

"Elias Warrington must—he shall—disgorge!"

"Vain hope."

"I will see him again to-night—this very hour. I will go to the knave; I will demand our rights."

"You will do nothing of the sort. I beg of you to dismiss the plan. It is wild, useless, dangerous."

"Dangerous? To me?"

"In your present condition, yes. You have been drinking too much this even-

ing. It has fired your blood and made you dream of rash things. I implore you, Theodore, to think of this no more. Abandon the vain hope now and forever. Warrington has the whip-hand, and he will hold it. You can do no good, and in your present condition you are unfit to talk with that cool, bloodless man. You might lose your temper; you might do something rash."

"I go this evening!" sullenly replied the younger brother. "I am going to demand my rights—our money!"

Alexander took the hot-headed speaker by the arm. Theodore pulled away angrily, but did not turn from his companion.

"Be reasonable!" urged Alexander.

"I seek justice!"

"With liquor in your stomach and confusion in your head?"

"Right is always right."

"Let me ask you not to do this foolish thing. It is twelve years since our father died, and if, as boys, we did not make a scientific investigation of the mystery of the disappearance of our money, you well know we have left no stone unturned since to get at the truth. We have failed; we can do no more. Theodore, let us accept our defeat and say no more about it."

"No!"

"Would you risk prison?"

"Willingly."

"I am a detective," added Alexander, as a last resort. "Would you risk ruining me?"

For the first time Theodore showed emotion. He had led a weak, foolish life, and let his chances pass him by, but he never had ceased to feel brotherly affection for his present companion. Alexander had made his final appeal with skill, well knowing Theodore's vulnerable point. He was not disappointed.

The younger man grew agitated.

"I surely do not want to injure you," he admitted.

"You are my brother."

"You think that if I go to Warrington's I shall get into trouble and disgrace you?"

"It would disgrace both of us, brother."

"I do not count; I am disgraced already."

Theodore bent his gaze on the sidewalk again. He was silent. The detective, too, said nothing. He waited to see the result. Presently Theodore spoke without looking up.

"It shall be as you say," he promised, reluctantly.

"Now you talk like a reasonable man."

"I had fully resolved to call on him to-night, and I am not sure that I was right, after all, but you have made an argument I cannot reject. By brains and ambition you have worked yourself up to an honorable position on the police force. I have no right to put you in jeopardy, and if I go into disgrace I should accomplish just that end. Right or wrong, wisely or the reverse, I will not visit the man who has robbed us."

"Nobly said, brother! Now you act the part of a prudent and sensible man, and I thank you for your promise."

Alexander spoke heartily, and reached out his hand. It was taken by Theodore, but not in a hearty spirit. When Theodore took his pledge he did not once look up. He did not look up now. His gaze was bent fixedly, gloomily at his feet, and his manner was sullen. He had yielded to the one appeal that could have moved him—the safety of his brother—but he was convinced against his will.

The conversation was kept up for some time longer, and the detective did his best to put Theodore in good spirits, but the effort was not a marked success. Theodore did not become contented of manner, or show any strong signs of conviction.

The elder man could not long delay. Always a busy person, he had work to do that night that could not be postponed, and he had to leave and attend to duty.

They parted at last. Alexander took the initiative, and, with an assumption of cheerfulness, he said a few words of pleasantry and moved briskly down the block. Before he went out of sight he

paused and looked back. Theodore was walking in the opposite direction, his step slow and his head bent as before.

The detective shook his head.

"I don't like his mood!" Alexander murmured. "He has promised, but his wishes are the same as ever, and if he should take to drinking again—. But he promised that he would drink no more to-night."

Theodore had made the promise just before they parted, but he had made the same promise many a time in the last few years and broken it speedily. He had been a wild young fellow. That has been said before, but the statement does not convey all the trouble the elder brother had experienced with him.

Alexander believed his kinsman to be perfectly honest, good hearted and incapable of wronging anybody, but he would drink, and he had been a wandering good-for-nothing all his life—a sailor, a soldier and plenty of other things.

"I hope it will all be well."

So murmured the detective, and when Theodore disappeared around a corner he, too, hurried off, going to his duties.

For some time he had been engaged on an intricate case which he hoped to bring to a close that night. In this he was not disappointed, and within a few hours he had bagged a desperate gang of men and the public had cause to rejoice when they were behind lock and key.

By that time it was past midnight, and, when Alexander had seen to the few bruises he had received, he turned his face homeward with a sigh of mingled weariness and relief.

Busy as he had been during the evening, he had not lost all recollection of Theodore. Several times the face of the younger brother had risen before him in imagination, and the fancy always brought him uneasiness.

Theodore had promised not to go near Elias Warrington. Had he kept his word, or had the liquor affected his muddled brain still further and led him to break his word? If so, it would not be the first time.

Alexander fully intended to go home, but his feet played him false, and, before he realized the fact, he found himself near Warrington's house. His mind had directed his steps without his being aware of it, so deeply was he buried in thought.

Finding himself so near, he decided to go on and have a look at the premises, though he did not know why he should care to go.

He reached the block; he walked on slowly.

"The street is dark, silent and deserted," he murmured.

Deserted? No! As he progressed he saw a man advancing with steps so quick that his pace was almost a run.

"He goes like one fleeing from the scene of a crime!" muttered the detective.

The man turned into a side street, and the light of a lamp fell briefly upon his face.

"Theodore! What is he doing here? Yes, and what is that cry behind him. There is an alarm. What? Somebody cries out wildly!"

CHAPTER II.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

Alexander Leland unconsciously spoke the words with plain vehemence. His mind was attuned to something startling, and when he thus caught sight of Theodore and heard the outcries not far away—more, and in the direction of Elias Warrington's residence—he lost for the time the reserve that made him unreadable as a detective.

The impression was strong that Theodore had done something not to be approved of, and the fear worried him.

"I'll see him now."

It was Theodore to whom he referred, but when he had hurried to the corner around which his brother had gone, he saw nothing more of him. The short block beyond was favorable to flight, and Theodore had made good use of his legs, it seemed.

"Shall I follow?"

The question was in Alexander's mind,

but quick steps behind him caused him to forget Theodore for the time. Somebody else hurried up, coming from the direction of Warrington's house.

This person was a white-haired old man, and he was not only out of breath, but his face moved with deep agitation.

"Oh! sir!" he gasped, "won't you go for an officer?"

"An officer?" repeated Leland.

"A policeman—a detective."

"I am a detective."

"Then come with me! Come quickly, sir!"

It was Alexander's business and custom to respond promptly to such calls, and for the moment professional zeal made him forget the man who had skulked down the side street and then run so rapidly.

"If I am wanted, lead on!" he directed.

"Come!"

The old man seemed to have breath to say no more, and his steps were far from firm as he moved along the backward path.

"What has happened?" demanded Leland.

"Give me a little time. I'll tell you soon—I am about exhausted now."

This statement was obviously correct, and nothing more was said until they had gone several rods. Then the guide paused in front of a house and the detective saw that it was lighted and full of signs of life.

The old man leveled a shaking finger.

"Murder has been done in there, sir!" he breathed, heavily.

Alexander's gaze mechanically sought the plate on the door.

He read the name there marked in bold letters.

It was that of Elias Warrington.

The detective grew cold and weak. Murder done in there?—in the house of the enemy of the Lelands? And Theodore had just come hurriedly from that direction.

"Just Heaven!" thought the officer, "what if that mad boy had called, yielded to rage and slain the master of the house?"

The guide rallied once more. He grasped Alexander's arm and pulled lustily for a moment.

"Come!" he urged.

It was sudden return of strength on his part, and the younger man was forced forward several steps, but he felt a striking reluctance to enter the building. For the time being the detective was lost in the outbreak of feeling in the man.

He stopped short as soon as he could command himself.

"Why should you give me such a story?" he almost incoherently asked. "Murdered? Why should murder be done here?"

"I don't know. I can only say it is so," answered the guide.

"A spark of life may remain."

"No. He is surely dead."

"Still, it may have been suicide."

"Impossible!"

"A burglar may have done it!" persisted Alexander.

"That's what we think."

"Aha! Do you? Good! This shows your common-sense. Of course it was a burglar. Why have you delayed? Why didn't you move promptly and seize the fellow?"

"We did; he is in there now, a prisoner."

The detective's face cleared suddenly.

"What's that?" he replied.

"The murderer has been caught red-handed."

"Then your master's death will be avenged."

"My master, sir? It is not he who has been murdered; it is Captain Dick Oliver."

Again Alexander had a surprise. He had judged the case from his fears, and it seemed that he had arrived at a conclusion wholly without foundation in fact. Great was his relief, but with it came vexation that the man himself should so long have kept down the detective. Why had he weakened and talked at random when a few questions right to the point would have cleared his mind? Anyhow, it was a happy discovery to know that his fears were unfounded. Theodore had not entered the house and killed Warrington in

the heat of passion and delirium of drink. No! It was another man slain, and killed by a miserable burglar. Good!

The detective rose superior to the men. "Who is Captain Dick Oliver?" he demanded.

"A guest of my master's, sir. But, come, sir, come!" and the guide aroused and pulled again at the officer's arm. "It is something terrible, sir!"

And then he fell to trembling anew, and seemed frightened out of his wits.

They entered the hall. On the floor above Alexander caught sight of a pale, terrified face as a woman peered over the balusters. He was prepared to encounter terror and incoherence at every point, but suddenly a calm, even voice, sounded from the parlor.

"Is that you, George?"

"Yes, sir," replied the old man. "I have brought a detective, sir."

"Usher him in here."

In all ways it was the voice of a master; and, more, Alexander Leland recognized the cool, collected manner of speech. He did not wait to be invited by George; he entered the parlor and the older man followed.

He was face to face with Elias Warrington. It was a matter of years since he had seen the man who was believed to have stolen the Leland fortune, but the latter had not changed.

He was a tall, slender person, who did not give the impression of much muscular strength, but he had a smooth, bland, quiet face, which told of feelings well under control, and of decided nerve.

He looked composedly at Alexander. Perhaps his memory of faces was not the best; he did not seem to recognize the new-comer.

"My man has told you what has happened here?" he questioned, in a somewhat irritated manner.

"He has, in a measure," briefly returned Alexander.

"Oblige me by taking charge of the case and doing what you think is necessary," directed Warrington, as if eager to be rid of all responsibility in the matter.

"Where is the dead man?"

"Up-stairs. George will take you there."

Elias Warrington sat at his ease, wrapped in his dressing gown. He seemed to have left bed hurriedly, but was as comfortable as circumstances would allow, and he evidently intended to remain so.

"I shall be pleased to have you show the way," replied Leland.

There was no emphasis on the pronoun "you," but Elias seemed to feel that it was a personal invitation.

"I can't be bothered at this hour of the night," he answered. "It is thoughtless of any man to choose such an hour to be murdered. I will await your report. George, lead him up!"

"One word," requested Alexander. "Who was this dead man?"

"Richard Oliver, late captain of the schooner 'Merry Mary.'"

"Your guest?"

"Yes."

By this time Leland was all officer and he could but be impressed by Warrington's indifference, but it was very like the master of the house. Elias probably never had wasted any grief on anybody in his life.

"The prisoner is up-stairs, sir," put in George, in his shaking voice. "Ought we not to see him at once?"

"Show me the way," directed Alexander.

They ascended the stairs. George held to the balusters and seemed as weak as ever, but they reached the upper floor, and then the servant pointed to a room at the rear.

"In there," he whispered.

The Double-Quick Detective laid a hand on his companion's shoulder and pushed him on ahead. They entered the room. It was one of death. On the bed lay what was left of Captain Dick Oliver.

The place which should have been one of rest was the spot where he had been slain. Who had done the deed?

Certainly not the host, Elias Warrington. Certainly not this timid, serving man.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW OF SUSPICION.

"This is the man!"

The words, spoken the moment Alexander crossed the threshold, seemed like an answer to his own question. It was George who gave the information. The detective looked and took in the situation quickly.

He saw a single man in the close grasp of two others. All were disturbed of manner, and rent clothes and scratched faces told of a struggle that had preceded the capture.

The prisoner was a man of less than thirty years, and in a certain circle of life he would have been called rather good-looking. He had a fine form, well-balanced head, hair that bordered on the reddish cast, a florid face and a small reddish mustache.

"Saloons, race-tracks, cards, ruin!"

So thought Alexander Leland, summing up the resorts and habits of the prisoner with the skill of an old hand. Then he looked at the still form on the bed. He who was dead was a man past middle age, athletic, gray and rough. Maybe he never had been a character to call for admiration, but death washes away misdemeanors and faults.

The detective's gaze wandered back to the group.

"Oblige me," he requested, "by giving a history of this affair in as few words as possible."

Of those who held on to the prisoner, one had the appearance of a servant. The other was well dressed, young and gentlemanly-looking.

"I will do my best," he replied. "I am Maurice Everton, nephew of Mrs. Persis Gordon, housekeeper for Mr. Warrington. The man on my left is James Black, a servant here. He who conducted you here is old George Gray, another servant. The dead man is Captain Dick Oliver, a temporary guest of Mr. Warrington's. The murderer—well, let him answer for himself."

The prisoner threw back his head with angry remonstrance.

"I am no murderer!" he declared, warmly.

"He was taken red-handed, in this very room," explained Maurice.

"It was chance," asserted the prisoner.

"Chance?" repeated Alexander. "Do you live here?"

"He does not," exclaimed Maurice.

"Was he invited here?"

"No."

"Then, prisoner, why are you here?"

The accused man's gaze sought the floor. He was troubled, but not confused. In all ways he showed the nerve of one used to buffeting the world and able to fight it stoutly. He appeared to consider what to do.

"What is your name?" pursued Alexander.

The prisoner raised his head and looked meditatively at the officer. Twice he was about to speak, but it was not until he made the third attempt that he found words to suit him.

"Call me Rattlefoot!" he then directed.

"Rattlefoot? The name is absurd."

"So is the charge brought against me."

"If you are innocent of the crime, you should be frank and win the confidence of those around you."

"It is a consummation devoutly to be hoped for," was the sneering retort. "The confidence of a detective is the last strand of the rope that hangs a man. It needs only the tying of the knot, and then—puff! off he goes."

"Let him call himself Rattlefoot!" exclaimed Maurice. "What does it matter? He would not be here unless he were guilty. He was not invited; he came without leave; he was taken red-handed, I repeat."

Rattlefoot held out his hands impetuously.

"Where is the blood?" he sharply demanded. "There is not one spot upon me. Find a stain, if you can."

"I spoke metaphorically."

"You would hang me with metaphors, but justice will triumph. I am innocent."

"Then why are you here, at night, where you are neither inmate of nor guest?" asked Alexander, quietly.

"I am no saint. I shall have to plead guilty to a part. I came to rob the house."

"Ah! a burglar!"

"Just the way we reason it out," put in Maurice. "He came to rob; was discovered by Captain Dick Oliver, and killed him in an attempt to escape. It is a clear case."

"Rubbish!" cried Rattlefoot. "The murderer was the fellow with the blond hair."

"There is nobody here who has blond hair," remonstrated Maurice.

"How wonderfully wise!" sneered the prisoner. "Do you think he has hung around through all this when an alarm was given and chance afforded him to escape? Bah! Go and curry your brains, youngster."

It was not a speech calculated to win favor from outsiders, but Alexander realized that it was very much like the way of the circle in which Rattlefoot undoubtedly moved. He had made the retort upon Maurice because it was his usual style.

"Who was this man with blond hair?" inquired the detective.

"I can't tell his name; he was a stranger to me. Possibly he was an intruder, like myself. I can't account for my presence here in any way that will clear my skirts of law-breaking, so I freely confess I came to rob. I have stolen nothing, because I did not have time. I have killed nobody, because somebody else is guilty. I am not a slayer of men."

"Maybe you can produce this blond man!" sneered Maurice.

"I cannot. He ran. Hear my story, for it is true. I came here to rob. I broke into the house by means of a burglar's set of tools. I was rummaging, and about to begin my work when the trouble happened."

"Explain!" directed Alexander, looking sharply at the prisoner.

"The house was strange to me; I entered this room to steal; I was on the scene at the wrong time. Just as I passed the door there were cries. Horrible cries!" added Rattlefoot, impressively.

"Uttered by whom?"

"By yonder man!" and the prisoner pointed to the form on the bed.

"Why did he cry out?"

"It was the hour of his extremity; he had been attacked by the night assassin. He cried out in terror and bodily pain."

Rattlefoot continued impressive, but the detective was impressed in one way not on the programme—he believed the prisoner was not telling the truth.

"What did you see?" pursued Alexander.

"The full scene; the slain man and the slayer. Captain Dick Oliver, if such be his name, was at the end of his rope. He gasped; he fell back in bed; he breathed convulsively; he died."

"And what of the man who did all this?" icily inquired the detective.

"He fled through yonder door," pointing to the hall. "He went and left me alone with the dead man. The cries had ceased, but the mischief was done. The alarm had been given; the inmates of the house came; I was found here. I was charged with the crime, but am as innocent as anybody here. I have harmed no one."

"Describe this blond man, who, you say, did the murder," Leland calmly directed.

"He was not a washed-out blond, but he had very fair hair and like complexion. A tawny head was his, and a complexion a girl might have envied. Tawny hair and mustache. A young fellow, too—not over twenty-five years of age. He wore a light gray suit, and a blue tie with long, flowing ends, with a high collar of the latest style. One thing only can I add to this—he wore a golden ornament of some sort on the lapel to his vest. Maybe it was a lodge badge. I caught the gleam of a reddish-hued stone set within it. This I saw distinctly, though I know not why I took in so much."

"It is remarkable."

It was Maurice who spoke, and there was the old sneer in his voice, but Alexander Leland was silent. The description

startled him. The prisoner had accurately described Theodore, his brother, even to the noticeable, but cheap, pin on his vest.

The detective felt a strange chill fall upon him.

Had he not just seen Theodore fleeing from the vicinity?

"There surely were steps in the hall," volunteered old George Gray, tremulously.

"And did I not tell you," added James Black, "that I thought I saw somebody flee out of the front door, and that, when I started to go out that way, I found the door unlocked?"

"All of which shows that my view of the case is correct," asserted Rattlefoot.

"If there was another man he was doubtless your ally," persisted Maurice.

"I had no ally; I came alone, and I intended to work alone all the way through. Gentlemen, I am telling you the truth. If you want to find the real murderer, waste no time on me, but look for the blond man in the gray suit."

Alexander shivered. What mad act had Theodore done?

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATAL NIGHT.

Alexander Leland stood silent and inactive, his mind filled with horror and dread. He had himself seen Theodore fleeing from the vicinity of the house, and now Rattlefoot had made a charge and backed it up with an accurate description of Theodore.

Maurice Everton was growing impatient. "For one," he remarked, "I take no stock in this yarn of a cornered desperado. Have you charge here, sir?"

The detective bestirred himself at once. "We will look into the facts of the case," he spoke. "I presume there is much to tell."

Walking closer to the bed, it was not hard to see how Captain Dick Oliver had died. A knife had ended his career, for the weapon was still in the breast close to the heart. Alexander secured the fatal blade.

"The slayer was a man," decided the crook-hunter, seeing that the knife had been driven home by a strong hand.

Appearances and theory indicated that he had been struck while asleep, but before life left his body he had moved and cried out, but he had died on the edge of the bed.

When Alexander had made all necessary observations, he secured Rattlefoot's wrists with light irons, then taking the prisoner's arm, he led the way down the stairs to the room where Elias Warrington had been seen before. The man was still there, seated in his chair and quite calm.

"Well," he spoke, in an even voice, "have you settled the matter?"

"We have a prisoner," replied Alexander.

"So I see. I congratulate you on having so soon settled it all. Can I aid you in any way?"

Warrington was noted for his blandness, and the quality shone pre-eminent now.

"I would like," interrupted Alexander, "to hear all that can be told me by those here."

"Men, speak out," Elias directed, promptly.

"Will you begin the account yourself?" requested the detective.

"I know nothing of it. I have seen nothing."

"The murdered man was your guest."

"Oh! you want preliminaries! Well, sir, they are at your disposal. I have not been up-stairs, but if, as I am told, the man thus summarily used was Captain Oliver, I knew him. He was master of the schooner "Merry Mary." This craft was recently lost at sea. Oliver has informed me. In fact, it was that which brought him here. I have had some dealings with him in the past, and though we were not in any degree friends—except in a commercial way—he used to call on me now and then to chat."

"Last night he called—the first time in some months. He was downhearted over

the loss of the schooner, as he had suffered a heavy financial blow, and he was sober and melancholy. It was this, and the fact that he had already remained so late, that finally led me to offer him quarters for the night. He accepted, and was conducted to a room by George Gray. I may say he had slept in my house a dozen times, all told, off and on."

"Proceed," Alexander requested.

"I have practically told all. I heard the cries from his room; was awakened by them. Then George came and told me what had happened. I have not been up, for I am averse to seeing any tragedy. I know no more about it."

"Who was the first on the scene?" continued Leland. "Mr. Gray, what do you know about it?"

Old George gave a violent start.

"I think we were all on the scene at about the same time, sir. By this I mean Maurice Everton, James Black and myself."

"What did you see, Mr. Everton?"

"At the first alarm I ran into the hall, not knowing whence the sounds came. A light burned in the hall. George Gray and James Brown were hurrying toward me from the opposite side. George cried: 'Where is it? Where is it?' I had no trouble in locating the sounds. I dashed into Captain Dick's room. The others followed me. We saw this prisoner struggling with Captain Dick; at least, the captain had hold of this man's sleeve. He had seized him in a death-grasp; he had held him until we arrived."

Rattlefoot smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "The youthful mind is imaginative," he remarked, coolly.

"We realized all at a glance," added Maurice. "We were not in time to hear any word from the captain, but we saw all. He fell back, the strength going from his arm as we looked. The murderer was free. He tried to run, but we balked his purpose. We seized and overpowered him. He was thus held until you came, sir."

"The knife was in Oliver's breast," reminded Leland. "Was this man's hand upon the weapon?"

"No. We were too late to see that."

"Right!" observed Rattlefoot. "My hand was never on that knife."

"The proof is absolute," declared Maurice.

Old George Gray was in a tremor of terror out of the ordinary course of events. James Brown was singularly silent, and his eyes shifted and dodged like those of an animal about to make a bolt for liberty. Maurice was singularly eager to convict the prisoner.

What did their ways mean?

All these emotions might have been felt and shown without there being uncommon meaning to them, but each seemed exaggerated. They were new to Leland. It was as if deeper feeling than usual stirred the trio.

"Is something being kept back from me?" wondered the detective.

"Elias Warrington's servants were three in number—Gray, Brown and a Mrs. Persis Gordon, who was housekeeper. Maurice was her nephew. For years he had visited her occasionally, and staying over night. Luck had made him her guest the night of the tragedy."

Alexander asked for Mrs. Persis Gordon. She came—a neat, well-formed, well-dressed woman of middle age and rather prepossessing appearance. She was quite calm, and, as Leland read character in her refined face, a person of an unusual sort.

"Madam," he began, "I am seeking to learn what the inmates of the house have seen and heard of this unfortunate affair."

"I regret, sir," she answered, "that I can tell next to nothing. I sleep well away from the room where the affair took place, and I was probably one of the last to hear the alarm."

"You did hear it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do?"

"I must confess, nothing. I was so frightened that I just simply cowered in bed until I was called and informed of what had occurred."

"Then you saw nothing?"

"Nothing, sir, as I said; I was so far away. Even when I was called I fear I was not in mood to be of use. I—I was terribly upset, sir."

Her voice faltered and her gaze fell. Alexander remembered the pale face he had seen at the head of the stairs when he first entered the house, and knew it had been hers. She was not so calm then.

"You seem to have obtained all the evidence," remarked Warrington.

"All at present," Leland agreed. "Now I will take the prisoner to the police station, where he will be secure, and the work can go on without him, as it shall do."

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT THE BASEMENT DOOR.

The next forenoon saw the Double-Quick Detective moving toward Warrington's to take up the trail anew there. He felt that he was far short of having all the facts in the case, and wanted more.

He had nearly reached the house when he was stopped by a person who barred his way. This was a youth of about sixteen years, though it would be hard to say just how many winters and summers he had seen come and go. He had an old head on young shoulders—that fact was clear.

"Say, boss," he exclaimed, "I've got business w'd yez."

Alexander looked at the sharp, shrewd face upraised to his own and unconsciously smiled.

"What is your line?" he asked.

"Oranges, bananas, lemons an' et setter. That's my stand over there," and he pointed to the corner. "I've bought out the Eyetalian who used ter run the corner, an' now I do it w'd T. Jefferson Jones as my man-o'-all-work. See him?"

The speaker again pointed, and Alexander saw a colored man busy about the stand.

"Yes, I see; but what is your business with me?" demanded the crook hunter.

"Ain't you the detective w'ot has the Oliver murder case to sift out and elocidate?"

Leland, suddenly interested, asked:

"What do you know about that?"

"Sure, ain't I read the mornin' papers? There wasn't much inter them, fer it was little time they had ter run off, but they had the skeleton ov the facts. Say, w'ot do yez make o' the blond man, anyhow?"

The fruit-vender was very serious, and Alexander surveyed him closely.

"Did you see anything of the affair?" he wished to know.

"I won't say I did, sor. My name is Teddy Ternan, an' anybody will tell yez I'm careful w'ot I say. Still, I reckon I kin put a blush o' suspicion on w'ot the burglar said about how he got inter the house. That Rattlefoot was givin' ye a song-an'-dance, sor, sure as guns."

"Why do you think so?"

"I believe I seen him go into d'e house, by d'e basement door, but I dont' bel'ave no more o' his yarn—ef the pape's hev' it roight. He told you he broke into d'e house, but he loied. He was let in."

Alexander watched Teddy closely. Not only had Rattlefoot told him this, but he had found scratches on the basement door as if burglars' tools had been used to force the door. Teddy was starting off on a very different line, and the detective at once was "on the scent."

"I seen him an' the feller w'd the bleached hair go in, an' I'll make me affidavit they was let in."

"What fellow with the bleached hair?" asked Alexander.

"Oh! there was two went in."

"Which went first?"

"Sure, they wint together."

"Give me the details."

"Easily done. I was passin' along w'd me day's worruk all done, an' a homesick feelin' in me cogitator—I always feel d'at way whin I think it's time to knock off worruk—whin I chanced to see thim two. They was goin' along side by side, an' it was harrud to till which was the drunk-est."

"Drunk? Who was drunk?"

"Both av thim. They lurched along until they come opposite the stoop av Warrington's house, an' thim they lurched some more an' wint into the yard. Wan av thim tapped gintly on d'e winder, where-upon the basement door was swung back fer thim an' they walked in, be jabers."

"Teddy, my boy, you are on the wrong track. It was not the burglar whom you saw."

"I'll bet me socks it was the feller you've got shut up, boss."

Teddy spoke with great confidence, but Alexander seemed unconvinced.

"Don't you see that your story does not harmonize with known facts? Rattlefoot has confessed that he broke in burglariously."

"Can't help that; probably he has some reason for lyin'. He has lied, dead sure pop. He was let in by somebody."

"Would he confess to burglary?"

"He was in the house; hadn't he as well confess to somethin'? He was in fer it, anyhow. He didn't do no harm to shield his ally who let him in, sure. But what become av the feller?"

"Who?"

"Why, the other drunk, boss. D'e man in gray clothes an' whitish hair, w'd a small mustache an' a reel slick face. 'Bout twinty-five years old, I guess. Had on a soft hat, too."

The fruit-vender had accurately described Theodore Leland, and once more the detective had a shock. He tried to continue calm, but it was hard with the heart of a brother under the vail of an officer.

"Describe the other man," he requested.

Teddy obeyed, and his description fitted Rattlefoot well. Neither he nor Theodore had been described in the morning newspapers, so it was not from this source that Teddy had drawn his information.

"I thought you ought to know this," pursued Teddy. "It alters the case whin you know that they was let in, don't it, boss? 'Cause then they must hev had an ally inside the house. See?"

The detective did "see," certainly, but he made no reply. He was a sorely puzzled man, and sore at heart, too.

"If I'm wanted, jest call on me," finally spoke Teddy, again. "They do be sayin' I am some at sharp worruk, meself. Some folks call me 'The Scorcher,' jist because I'm a hustler, an' it's meself has heard you're d'e same sort. If I can help yez at any toime, jest let me know."

"I will."

Alexander still spoke absently, and he moved on without more words. Teddy watched him thoughtfully.

"There goes a corker! I'd loike to get into his good graces, an', begorra, if I can learn more av this case I will. Jeff Jones can look out for d'e stand, an' I'll study the game Mither Leland is on."

Alexander proceeded toward the Warrington house. Before he could ring, old George Gray opened the door, his face expressing anxiety to say something. He said it at once.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN DICK'S DAUGHTER.

"You have come just in time, Mr. Leland. You are needed," and old George Gray looked much perturbed as he spoke.

"Needed?" returned the detective.

"Why?"

"Master has gone out, and a very violent young woman here is making things unpleasant for us."

"Who is she?"

"She calls herself Aola Oliver, and says she is the daughter of the old captain."

"So Mr. Warrington is away? Where?"

"I don't know, sir. He ordered a carriage, and off he went with James Black driving, as usual, sir."

"The young woman has come since?"

"Yes, sir, sorry to say. She is very violent. She wants to see my master, and seems to blame him because an accident happened under his roof. Poor man! why should she do that? And she really does insist that he is not away, but is hiding from her, though land knows there is no reason why he should."

"I will see the bereaved lady."

"Bereaved? Ah, sir; look out she don't snap your head off."

Gray was sent to summon her to the parlor, and there she soon joined Alexander. She came in with a rapid step and a fine sweep of her black dress, and Alexander saw a tall, handsome brunette, whose face was full of character and feeling.

It was a tear-stained face, but she opened the conversation at once.

"Do you represent Elias Warrington?" she demanded.

"No. I may say that I represent the law. I am a detective."

"Then you are just the man I wish to see!" she exclaimed.

"I am at your service, miss."

"I am Aola Oliver, daughter of the man whose life has been so brutally taken."

"You have my sympathy, Miss Oliver."

"I want more. I want justice."

"An arrest has been made."

"Yes; you have struck at the top of the tree, not at the roots."

"I do not understand."

"Do you think you have the man who is most guilty? Do you think that miserable fellow played more than a minor part? He says he broke into the house; I say he was admitted, and to kill my father!" cried Aola.

Her emotion was deep, and it brought the color to her face with a rush. Alexander was again surprised. Here was this stranger repeating just what Teddy Tierman had alleged.

"What evidence have you of such a charge?"

"Evidence? Why, Elias Warrington hated and feared Captain Oliver, and I know well enough that he was the real slayer. He made my father his guest purposely to have him slain!" swiftly asserted the girl.

"Let us speak in low tones," he requested. "Why do you assert what you do without positive proof?"

"Why? I'll tell you! My father was a sea captain—master of the 'Merry Mary.' On his last voyage the vessel was scuttled and lost—and this was done by his subordinates, by command of Elias Warrington."

"Can you prove it?"

"Yes, I can. My father said so, and he came here last night to charge Warrington with the crime and demand full money satisfaction. He declared that if he was not paid for his heavy loss he would have Warrington arrested."

"Why should Warrington wish to scuttle the 'Merry Mary'?"

"He shipped goods on her, but never intended they should reach port. It was a device of his to swindle those with whom he dealt, and do it by sinking vessel and cargo. The goods were worth far less than they were insured for, you see."

"What proof is there of this?"

"My father told me so, himself."

"But the proof—the proof! Remember that accusation goes for nothing in law. Where is the proof?"

Aola's face fell. She had been speaking with bitter vehemence, but was rational enough to see the point thus presented. She became silent, thinking deeply, and Alexander gave her time. Presently she spoke again.

"I fear that legal proof may not be easy to get. I know only what my father told me. The proof, if there is any, must be sought from the sailors formerly on board the 'Merry Mary.' What they can tell I don't know, but my father was positive, and he was a man of truth."

"Can any of the men be found?"

"I don't know. Very likely they are now scattered, in order to ship again. The most trusty of the lot, and, in fact, the only one known to me by name, was a certain Josh Rockaway. If we could only find him!"

"But how would that connect Elias Warrington with the slaying of Captain Oliver?"

"I tell you it was Warrington who did it. My father was mad, ever to think of sleeping under this roof. How? Why, father said that Warrington would as soon kill him as not—that he was equal to any crime. So I here declare that it was he

who killed my poor father—that Elias Warrington is a murderer!"

Aola paced the room excitedly, and Alexander sat watching her with calm exterior, when the silence was broken by the clicking of a key in the lock of the street door. Steps sounded in the hall; the parlor door opened—Elias Warrington entered.

The Double-Quick Detective kept his seat, determined to let the others have everything to themselves.

Warrington stopped short when he saw who was there, and for a moment his gaze wavered between the two.

The pause was enough; the girl swooped down upon him.

One of her gracefully-rounded arms was outstretched, and the shapely finger pointed accusingly at Elias.

"You have done murder!" she cried.

Warrington started back, but he looked at the girl with a degree of almost placid coolness.

"Oh! so it is you, Miss Oliver?" he replied.

"It is I!" she cried. "I, the daughter of the man you have murdered. Oh! you need not seek to deny it—I know you well! Richard Oliver is dead, slain by an assassin hand, and you! you!"—she gathered force with her own speech—"are the one who murdered him."

CHAPTER VII.

ELIAS IS ACCUSED.

The detective watched with keenest attention. Warrington looked pained, but there was not the least trepidation in his manner.

"My dear young lady," the accused responded, "you are nervous now. Pray let me advise you. A physician would be best for you. Some soothing compound, judiciously administered, will calm—"

"Sir, you insult me!" flashed Aola. "I say you killed my father."

"I did invite him to rest under my roof, but I did not suspect that the desperate robber would come—"

"Invited him? Yes, to death. You had him stay here with the deliberate purpose of killing him. You waited until he was asleep, and then put him out of the way. If it was not your own hand that struck the blow, you hired another to do it—by the robber you had introduced to your house for that very purpose!"

Elias seemed pained at this statement; still there was no trepidation in his manner or dismay in his looks.

"You are seriously unnerved," he mildly answered. "This terrible affair has upset you as much as it has me. My dear child, believe me, I will do all that is possible to get at the facts. The assassin is now in the hands of the law, and your personal welfare shall not be forgotten. Richard Oliver was a friend of mine, and I will—"

"Stop, sir! How dare you profane his memory by claiming to be his friend? You are his assassin. You—you struck the blow!"

Closer to the man she stepped as she spoke, but Warrington still retained his composure.

"Villain! I will accept nothing from your crime-stained hands!" vehemently protested the girl.

"Useless, useless!" sighed Elias.

"Yes, it is useless to seek to hoodwink me!" asserted Aola.

Alexander came quietly into the conversation. He had seen how vain it was to hope for any self-betrayal on Warrington's part, if there was anything to betray.

"We talk to no purpose," the detective observed. "Let us be more practical. Mr. Warrington, have you anything further to say to help in the case?"

"I deeply regret to say, nothing; but if I can aid you, my services and those of all my household are at your disposal. See them! Question them! Use all means to forward your work."

It looked like a frank offer, but the detective was now doubly wary. Aola's strong but unproven arraignment had, in truth, made a strong impression.

Alexander then undertook to see the girl

well away from the house before he did more. She was ready enough to go, but complicated matters by declaring that her father's body should remain no longer in the house.

She was then informed that permission from the authorities was necessary, and to this she yielded, but had her shot at Warrington.

"I dare say that his spite will not extend to a lifeless body!" she remarked, looking at Elias.

The latter sighed and turned away. He seemed like a good man who had exhausted all his resources and could do no more than to let all rest now.

Aola did not linger. She had come to accuse Warrington; she had done so and was ready to go. Her anger had not lessened, however, and the look she gave him when unaccompanied she passed out was proof enough that she would not falter in purpose to bring the man to the bar of justice to answer her accusation.

"Poor child!" sighed Elias. "She is nervous, heartbroken, sorely beset. Being a woman, she is illogical, too. I feel for her very much, and will do all I can for her."

"You will probably hear from her again. There was more of menace in her looks than in her words."

"Do you think so, Mr.—. Well, really, I think I have not heard your name, sir."

"Leland."

Warrington's mild eyes took on a keener light. He peered curiously at his companion.

"Leland, Leland, did you say?"

"A son of Edward Leland," added the detective, his voice growing hard.

Warrington looked intensely at him. The eyes were full of deeper, darker light now, fairly changing their color. He raised his hand and rubbed his thin face in an odd manner.

"Then you are the—one of the boys—"

"I am Edward Leland's son."

"And a detective?"

"That is my calling."

The man's placidity was upset, evidently, but his effrontery seemed quite equal to the situation.

"Bless me, bless me! Is it so? I had entirely lost sight of you. So you are the boy—the elder son, I dare say; he had the most force of character. Dear me, yes! Well, well, Mr. Leland, I congratulate you on your rise in life, and on having achieved so honorable a profession. Quite pleasant to know."

"As this does not concern the work I have in hand, I will now go up-stairs, with your permission, and see the scene of the tragedy again."

"Do so, by all means. Everything seems settled, but due search should be made for minor evidence. Quite right."

Alexander was at the door, and with Mr. Warrington nodding in approbation, he passed the threshold and walked up the stairs.

"Bland as a May morning," thought the officer. "But what is behind the velvet? Theodore and I have had our opinion of him; Aola Oliver has hers. Elias Warrington, if there is a weak spot in your armor I am going to find it!"

Near the head of the stairs the detective met old George Gray, who was passing along the hall, when he unexpectedly run upon the caller. To the detective it seemed the most matter-of-fact encounter imaginable, but the gray-haired servitor gave a gasping cry, and then stood shaking strangely.

"Hello!" exclaimed Alexander, "what's the matter?"

Old George's lips moved tremulously.

"I—I—I didn't see you!" he chattered. "I thought—I didn't know—I wasn't sure—"

And right there he came to a full stop.

"Wasn't sure of what?"

"That I saw you."

His alarm and his incoherent speech would have been amusing if there had been nothing more to it. There was more, and now, as on the previous evening, Alexander was impressed with the belief that there was more to his perturbation than should arise from what was known.

Obedying a sudden impulse, the detective took old George by the sleeve, lowered his voice and asked:

"See here, what's up; what are you keeping back?"

"I, sir, I? Keeping back? Really, I don't understand, sir."

"About this murder affair! Out with it! What's your secret? You are dealing with the law, George. The law is a terrible thing. It has the habit of getting a grip on a man—getting him by the throat, as I may say—and then—why, it just chokes the life out of him. You know, George!"

He was playing on the old man's feelings, and with satisfactory results. The servant shook more than ever.

"There is nothing, sir, nothing," he declared.

"Nonsense! You know more of the killing than you have told. What is it? Out with it, old man! What did you see last night? What clew have you to the truth that you haven't told? Speak!"

"My dear sir, I have told all. I have; indeed, I have. I know nothing."

"He who is not with the law is against it."

"I would gladly tell if I could, but the affair seems very simple and all told. Don't you think so, sir? I do; I really think so. It is all told."

"Rubbish!" and Alexander cast off his hold forcibly. "George, when you get ready to speak, let me hear from you, but don't wait too long, it will not be safe. The truth will out, and he who keeps anything back will suffer."

One moment he gazed into the servant's face, and then, reading through the tremors and fears therein shown that George was not in the least inclined to speak then, he quietly added:

"The truth will out!"

The detective passed into the room where the mortal part of Captain Dick Oliver still lay. The coroner had been there, and an officer was on guard.

Alexander found nothing new, but, talking with the officer, passed some time there.

When he went out he encountered Mrs. Persis Gordon in the hall; she had been waiting for him. He noticed that her face was drawn and haggard, as if she had passed a restless night.

"Pardon me, sir," she quickly began, "but can I speak with you a moment?"

"Certainly, madam."

"Where—where is the unfortunate man who was arrested here last night?"

"In the hands of the police, madam; locked up and charged with murder."

Persis clasped her hands nervously.

"It is a wrong—a great wrong. It is wicked!" she cried, excitedly.

CHAPTER VIII.

MYSTERIOUS WITNESSES.

"So here is another one!" thought the acute shadower.

"The law is cruel, unjust, blind!" and she almost sobbed as she spoke.

"There is no proof that the wretched man killed Richard Oliver!" she went on, excitedly. "He had no weapon and no stain of blood. He did not run away. A guilty man would have fled. Did not James Black say he saw a man flee out of the front door just as the alarm came, and did not he find that door unlocked?"

"I think James did say so."

"Then why hold the man? He is innocent; the other man did the deed. All the evidence points that way!"

"But what about Rattlefoot being with Captain Oliver, and struggling with the mariner when the latter was dying?"

"It was a fatal chance. The—wretched man has confessed to attempted burglary. Ill luck made him seem guilty of harming Oliver."

Persis was eager; she was excited; she was vehement. Color burst forth in her once-pallid face, and she seemed to glow with her emotions. She perplexed Alexander deeply.

"Who, think you," he continued, as if in deep thought, "is this self-styled Rattlefoot?"

"I don't know, sir."

"It appears that he is a fellow of criminal ways, else he would not have attempted burglary."

"It—it may have been his first offense," faltered Persis.

"If we could but prove it."

"Try, try!"

"Light is essential to success. Can you help me? Who is our friend Rattlefoot? What is he? If he is innocent, how came he mixed up with the real murderer? Most of all, who was the man with him who really did the deed?"

"A blond young man in a gray suit."

"So Rattlefoot says—"

"And so says James Brown. He recalls, now, that as the stranger fled through the front door he noticed that he was clad in gray and had light-hued hair."

Alexander's gaze wavered. Why did these people persist in talking of a young man with blond hair and a gray suit? He wished Theodore never had worn gray.

"But Theodore is innocent; of course he is."

Thus argued the detective to himself, while, aloud, he sharply commanded:

"Send James Black here! I want to speak with him!"

Persis went, but it was some time before James put in an appearance. When he did come he stood with downcast eyes and a nervous manner, which made the detective wonder if everybody in the house had gone daft since Captain Dick Oliver was killed.

"James," Alexander began, "what about your man who slid out of the front door when the cries of distress began?"

"Really, sir, I don't know anything more about him than I have told you," answered the servant, hastily.

"You did not tell me he wore a gray suit, yet I understand you now recall such dress on his part."

"True, sir, true. It is very vivid in my mind now. I overlooked it momentarily."

"What more? How did he look?"

"I am not sure, sir, but I think he was a young man."

"A beardless boy, maybe."

"I—I don't know," muttered James, never looking at Alexander.

"Then how the dickens do you happen to think he was young?"

"Why, sir, his face—I mean, his movements were those of a young man. Yes, sir!"

James looked up suddenly, as if much relieved by his own explanation, thereby adding to the perplexity he had caused. Leland could almost have sworn that everybody in the house was lying to him, or, at least, keeping something back. Mysterious household!

He touched James on the arm none too lightly.

"Bestir your wits!" he ordered. "You can think of more if you try. Do it, by all means. You don't want to get mixed up with this matter and have to go to a cell to keep Rattlefoot company, do you?"

"No, no; indeed, I do not!" hastily asserted James.

"Then make a clean breast of it all. You know more. Out with it!"

The servant seemed to be frightened remarkably. Hastily he cried:

"I don't know anything more—indeed, I do not, Mr. Leland. I have told all. I should have told it at first, only I was so confused."

"What's the matter with you now; you tremble; you evade my gaze; your features are playing leap-frog with each other. They shiver so."

"I—I am scared, sir!" muttered James.

"Scared? Why?"

"This dreadful affair, sir. It shakes me all up."

"If you are telling the truth you have nothing to fear. The killer will come no more to Warrington's house, and your precious life is safe. But, oh! James, if you lie, or keep anything back, the law will take you in hand and—well, twenty years in Sing Sing is said to be monotonous."

Alexander had assumed a grave and tragic air, but it did no good. If James was hiding a secret he hid it all the closer,

and he declared with emphasis that he was keeping nothing back.

The detective had stirred him up purposely, hoping the man would weaken. As he did nothing of the sort, Alexander proceeded to smooth down his plumage, and a few jokes restored James to a measure of his former composure. It could not give him tranquillity, for his mind was not at ease.

When the detective dismissed him, it was with renewed conviction that he was hiding something essential to the Captain Dick Oliver case.

Alexander went all over the house again. He sought for signs everywhere, but could not say he was much the wiser when he finished his tour. One thing added to his belief in Teddy Tiernan's statement that Rattlefoot had been admitted, and had not broken into the house.

There were scratches on the lock of the basement door, as if it had been forced, but, with suspicion aroused, Leland thought they did not look right. It was more as if somebody had made the scratches to deceive observers.

He left the premises finally, feeling that the whole case was one of profound mystery, and that he was not getting the truth from any one inmate.

He went home. He was an unmarried man, and had a single room at a quiet house where furnished rooms were rented. He saw nobody on his way to the room, but a surprise awaited him when he opened the door.

The room was not untenanted.

Theodore Leland was there.

The younger brother was on his feet, and the pose of his body indicated that he had started up in alarm when Alexander's hand rattled the lock. The brothers stood facing each other.

"You here?" exclaimed Alexander.

"Are you alone?" hastily inquired Theodore.

"Yes."

"Does anybody know you are here—any officer?"

"No."

"Is an officer likely to come?"

"No."

"Thank Providence!"

Theodore sank into a chair and drew a deep, quivering sigh. Alexander surveyed him with a sinking heart. Theodore was not a model of neatness or good order. His hair was disheveled and erratic, his clothing—all of which was of gray—was crumpled and wrinkled, and his haggard face and reddened eyes told of want of sleep, and, possibly, much more that was wretched.

It was a melancholy picture, and the elder brother looked for several minutes without saying anything. He could not speak. Where Theodore was concerned he was not a cool-headed officer—he was all human when that brother was under thought.

Theodore had been looking toward the floor. Suddenly he raised his head, caught the gaze fixed upon him, hesitated, and then broke into a harsh, unnatural laugh.

"How do you like the view?" he demanded.

"View of what?" mechanically asked Alexander.

"Of me—of the black sheep—of the Ishmael of the Lelands?"

"Do not speak thus!"

"What would you have me say? What can I say that is good when the scapegrace of the family is concerned?"

"Theodore, what have you been doing?"

"Yes, what? Drinking? Robbing? Perhaps! Maybe I have done murder!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE YOUNGER BROTHER.

Theodore spoke with reckless bitterness, but he had thrown a bombshell into Alexander's camp, so to speak. The detective looked horrified.

"What?" he gasped. "You have done murder?"

"I said, perhaps," Theodore answered.

"Were you jesting?"

"Well, yes."

"For Heaven's sake, jest no more. You almost turned my blood to ice. Do not add anything to your known—"

Theodore laughed unmusically and bitterly.

"You hesitate; you stop; you are reluctant to finish your caution. Let me complete your sentence. Add nothing to my crimes, you would say. How can I? What dark and loathsome pool of sin is there that I have not waded in? I, a Leland! Sin? Why, man, I am steeped in it!"

He threw back the hair from his forehead with fierce intensity, and then he began to pace the room wildly.

"Remember my record," he pursued. "What is there about it that is commendable? What is there that is not black? Crime? Why, it is my foster-parent—my home, my food, my drink, my everything. I have gone the rounds and sown the seeds of sin until there is a crop to harvest that is all thorns and tares. That's what every man comes to if he goes the same gait. I have gone it, and I am a wreck and an Ishmaelite. I am the tare—the forbidding weed of the Leland field."

Back and forth across the floor went the younger brother, and his wildness of manner seemed to increase. It was a terrible picture for Alexander, but he had been given time to recover in a measure, and he found his own speech.

"Theodore, what has brought you to this?"

"Sin!" was the terse, swift reply.

"You are in a new mood. Why are you so excited?"

"I have looked within and seen the monster that I am. The sight frightened me—my whole heart and soul recoiled from it."

"Something has happened to you."

"So there has."

"What?"

Theodore stopped. He faced his companion and there was dogged firmness in his manner. He touched his hair.

"Blond!" he spoke.

He touched his clothing.

"Gray!" he added.

He touched the cheap pin which was fastened to the lapel of his vest.

"Gold, with a reddish-hued stone!" he concluded.

Alexander felt the old chill creep over him again. It was just as Rattlefoot had described the man upon whom he had tried to throw the blame of slaying Captain Dick Oliver—the man who, he asserted, had been there that night.

"Just Providence!" gasped the detective, "Do you mean that you killed Oliver?"

"The hair, the suit of clothes, the pin!" slowly repeated Theodore.

"And you—you did the deed!"

"Here is the evidence."

"Then may God help us both!" groaned Alexander.

Theodore took a fierce step forward.

"You, you—what would you do? If the criminal is here—here in the person of the tares of the field—what would you do? Your duty is plain. You are an officer; you are sworn to act as the law directs. Obey! See! Here I hold out my hands; put the irons upon them. Give me a cell. Act! Arrest me!"

Vehemently the wretched man spoke, but Alexander stepped back.

"The detective is but the armor of the man," he responded. "Were I a thousand times an officer I would not do this thing you suggest. Betray you? Never, never! On the contrary, I will fight for you, in court or out. If you are guilty—but I will not, cannot believe it. Believe? Never! Though proof comes as thick as winter snow I'll not believe. You are our mother's son!"

Theodore had seemed to waver. Now his passion-filled eyes softened and tears gushed to them.

"You will not believe?" he repeated.

"I will not!"

"Even if proof is offered, you would fight for me?"

"I would—I will!"

"And you an officer?"

"I am a brother. More, I am the boy to whom our mother often gave the duty of caring for her younger child—her best loved one!"

Theodore's endurance gave way entirely.

He sank into a chair, and tear-drops rained from his eyes.

"I do not deserve this," he murmured.

"I will stand by you. I will prepare your case. I will have the best legal talent in New York. I will see judges, politicians, clergymen. All shall be enlisted in your defense. Let me hear the case; tell me everything, and the defense shall begin now."

Alexander spoke with swift impetuosity, but Theodore raised his drooping head and interrupted.

"Wait!" he requested. "I am not sure I am guilty."

"Not sure? Don't you know?"

"No."

"How can that be?"

"Do you know of a _____er that steals men's wits away?—that is a devil in the guise of a friend, as some think?—that bears ruin, desolation, disgrace and misery wherever it touches its cursed hand? Some call it liquor."

"Well?"

"The insidious demon stole my wits away last night. I know not whether I am guilty or not."

"Do you mean—"

"I was at Warrington's house last night, but what I did there, or what others did, I don't know. My mind was a blank. I don't know what happened."

"Then how do you know you were there?"

"I came to my senses as I fled from the house. I think something horrible aroused me from my state of mind. I believe I saw the murder done by somebody. Who was it? Did I do it? Or was it some one else?"

"Tell me all that you do know."

Alexander saw the need of judicious action, and he drew a chair up close to Theodore, and sat down. He had grown calm in his endeavors to grasp the situation, and his even, kindly voice had effect on his companion.

"When I left you, early in the evening, you exacted a promise that I would drink no more. Did you believe I would keep it? Did you think there was one grain of manhood left in my miserable being?"

"Whatever you did is past. Let us face the facts. You promised. Did you fall?"

Theodore's eyes fell, and head dropped.

"I fell," he admitted.

"And then?"

"Believe me, I left you with firm resolution to keep all my promises. I intended to stay away from Elias Warrington, and to refrain from taking another drop of liquor. A drinking man's word is a brittle reed. His body, his mind, his will, his manhood, are alike weakened and debased. I fell. My demon foe lured me on; I thought it would do no harm to take one more drink. I took it; my will went all to pieces, and I took more."

"Poor boy!" murmured Alexander.

"Confusion of mind followed. I vaguely remember meeting a man who is now to me unknown, though I suspect it was this Rattlefoot who is in jail."

"Did he urge you on to crime?"

"I would not do him injustice, but I know he urged something upon me; I cannot say what, as it's all gone from me. Next, I remember that we walked on somewhere, I staggering very much, until we came to a house. We entered the area."

"And then, and then?"

"We entered the house. How we got in I can't say positively, but I would almost swear that we were admitted by somebody."

"Some inmate of the house?"

"Well, somebody already inside. I take it 'twas one of the regular household."

The detective thought of Teddy Tiernan's testimony.

"Once inside," pursued Theodore, "all memory left me. I suppose I was like other drunkards who go home with tolerable straightness and then collapse wholly, mentally, when once within."

"It is a pity you cannot remember."

"Right! So it is, as it would simplify things much. The next I do remember I was fleeing wildly from the house, dashing down the stoop, and then along the street, anxious to get clear of—what?"

"There is no clew?"

"None. I have the impression, however, that something occurred that terrified me—ay, that appalled me. The horror, whatever it was, stirred my deadened brain to action—I fled to gain safety."

"Do you think you—that you saw—"

"I fear I saw Captain Oliver killed. Frankly, I may have done it myself. I don't know, and that is the great question in my mind. The man was slain. Who did it? Am I a murderer?"

CHAPTER X.

THE RED STAIN ON THE SLEEVE.

The detective was slow to answer the question. If he had been given reason to doubt Theodore in the past, he did not doubt now. He was positive that he was getting the truth as near as Theodore could give it, and the full truth, too. He saw, as the younger brother did, the possibilities of the case, and the difficulty of settling it.

Several minutes of silence followed, and then Theodore resumed:

"I have read the newspaper accounts of this affair. From what they say I am inclined to think that the room in which Oliver was slain was the one where Elias Warrington slept when we were there before, years ago, and where we visited him."

"But he occupies it no longer," replied Alexander quickly, his face brightening momentarily.

"No."

"It is your theory that, if you harmed Oliver, you did it thinking it was Warrington?"

"Exactly."

"Warrington no longer sleeps there, and you could not mistake the two men, one for the other."

"A sane man could not—I was not sane. The question is, did I, stupefied with liquor though I was, still retain enough wit to remember where Warrington once slept, and go there, as I thought, to avenge the wrongs he had done us?"

"Providence forbid!"

"Yet, it is possible."

"Yes."

"Right there lies the danger. I could not wish to harm Oliver, and if I did harm him, it must have been that I thought he was Warrington. Drunken fool! why have I allowed liquor to befog my brain and wreck my life?"

Theodore dropped his head into his hands, and sat the picture of despair. The detective began to look further.

"This Rattlefoot—have you no idea who he is?"

"None."

"Where did you meet him?"

"I don't know."

"Was it he who suggested going to Warrington's?"

"So I suppose. Anyhow, he piloted me there. Little as I know about the miserable affair, I am sure I could not have reached the place without the support of his arm. He was the leader. I do not say this to acquit or excuse myself; it is mere justice to say he was the leader. He took me there. Why? What did he want of me, a staggering drunkard as I was then?"

"Especially if he had matters fixed so he was to be admitted by some inmate of the house?"

"Yes. How could I be useful to him?"

The brothers regarded each other in silence. They felt that the puzzle was too much for elucidation. What had been Rattlefoot's object?"

Presently Alexander spoke again, and the case was discussed in all its bearings. No light was gained.

Finally the striking of a clock in another part of the house caused Theodore to start. He then exclaimed:

"I must go."

"Where?"

"I know not. To some place of concealment. I must hide like a hunted wolf. For your sake, if not for my own, I must keep out of sight. Where do I go? Ask the ragged tramp of the street where he will herd, with no home but the pavements and the docks. I know as little

of my destination as he. I will go somewhere; I will creep like a rat into a hole; I may seek the slums and breathe the pestilential air of the holes under ground; I may grovel in the garrets, or skulk in the parks of the Annexed District. But rest assured that I'll do my best to hide, so that people may not cry, 'Yonder is a murderer, the kinsman of Alexander Leland, the detective!' I'll protect your reputation!"

"No, no! Think, instead, of yourself."

"I care not for myself."

"I care for you."

"Cease to do so."

"Never!"

"What am I that you should give me one thought?"

"The child of our mother."

"Well for her that she is in heaven!"

"And my brother."

"Brother? Will you—dare you use the word?"

Bitterly Theodore asked the question, but Alexander moved forward and took his hand impetuously.

"You never were so much my brother as now. You never before so needed my aid, and I was never so anxious to give it. Brother, we will fight side by side in this!"

Great tear-drops again rolled down Theodore's cheeks. He tried to speak, but failed. The detective caressed the hand he held, but, even if he was allowing his affection to hold full sway, he did not forget the practical side of the case.

Presently he touched the gray coat Theodore wore.

"This suit is no longer safe for you. Your blond hair, the color of this cloth, ay, even the pin on your vest—all speak too plainly of Rattlefoot's story. You might be recognized with these things on."

"I—think not. I'll wear them."

"No. Why do you insist? Get them off! But maybe you have no other clothes?"

"You have solved the riddle. I have none other."

"I will fit you out. I'll give you what you need; I'll equip you anew from head to foot. Off with this coat."

Alexander pulled at the sleeve, and Theodore rose and gave his acquiescence and aid. The coat was removed.

"Now," added the detective, "the vest—What?"

"Eh?"

"The sleeve of your shirt—the sleeve!"

Theodore glanced down. The wristband and several inches of the white cloth beyond was spattered and stained with red spots.

Both men stood gazing mutely at the suggestive signs. The most dull-witted of observers would have said under any circumstances that the marks were of blood, and the Lelands, with their fears keyed up to such a pitch, could not be blind to the evidence. There was dismay—even terror in their fixed regard.

Seconds passed unheeded, and the silence remained unbroken, but it must have an end. Alexander finally raised his gaze to Theodore's ashen face.

"What is that?" he asked, huskily.

"I don't know."

"How came it there?"

"I did not before know it was there."

"How could you have got it on?"

Theodore looked mutely at his brother for a brief period; then he slowly spoke:

"Blond hair, gray suit, gold pin with a reddish-hued stone set in it."

"Surely you don't think—"

The detective stopped short and Theodore finished for him.

"How should it have come there if I did not get it at Warrington's house last night?"

"You advance an awful possibility."

Theodore touched the red spots in a gingerly way.

"What fiendish thing are you?" he muttered. "Dye of red, tell us the truth! Are you the life-blood of Richard Oliver? Speak!"

"Why have you not seen this before?" inquired Alexander.

"Because the spots were not there night before last, and since that fatal visit to

Warrington's I have not had my coat off until now. I have had no opportunity to see."

"Could the drops have spattered there when Oliver was struck?"

"Why not?"

"Your coat-sleeve—"

"Was short, as you can see by replacing the garment. It would protect the upper part of my arm from such a spattering, but not the lower portion; the blood could spurt up the open sleeve, if my arm was held at the right angle."

"Surely, you should remember this matter? Do you recall a blow, or the shedding of blood?"

"All is blank."

"Be the facts what they may, we must end this danger you are in. The coat must be burned—aye, and every part of that accursed suit. Off with it; off with every garment, and we will get the tell-tale things out of sight."

"It shall be so."

Theodore's coat had been thrown upon a chair. He now began to unbutton the vest with feverish haste, but only two buttons had been touched when he was interrupted.

Rat-a-tat-tat!

It was a knock at the door, and the honored detective, whose life had been so upright and open to the world, started like a snared criminal. His face quivered with emotion.

"Somebody to see me!" he exclaimed.

"I must hide!"

"Into yonder closet! Hasten! In with you!"

Theodore needed no urging. The closet door was partially open, and he made a dive in that direction, passed the threshold and was in cover. He drew the door to after him and was concealed from view. The detective pressed the door tighter, and then stood for a moment to regain his composure.

Again the knock sounded in the direction of the hall, and Alexander waited no longer. He moved forward, turned the knob and faced the caller. Theodore was by no means satisfied to let all progress pass unseen by him, and he opened a crevice and used his own eyes.

The detective needed no introduction to his visitor. He recognized Mrs. Persis Gordon, housekeeper for Elias Warrington. He made the recognition with fresh anxiety, but while he hesitated as to his proper course, she crossed the boundary line uninvited. For weal or woe she was in the room.

Persis was not calm. That was evident in her expression and her movements, and Alexander wondered what was coming. She closed the hall door behind her.

"Mr. Leland, I want to see you on business," she announced.

"I can give you a little time, madam. However, I have business to do, and I must ask you to be brief."

"Business!" she echoed. "I suppose it is the hunting to his death of that unhappy man arrested at our house."

"He is innocent—I know it, and I want the real criminal found, and found at once. Do not waste your time on false trails. That is always the way with officers—they blind themselves, believe stubbornly in the guilt of a man they see fit to suspect, and then look no further."

"Have you come to advance new theories in the case?" mildly inquired Alexander.

"Not exactly. I touched the truth when I talked with you last."

"You do not think Rattlefoot guilty?"

"I do not."

"He was found struggling with the dying man."

"Unlucky chance!"

"Very unlucky!" drily agreed the detective.

"He was frank with you; he admitted that he was there to rob. Does that count for nothing in his favor? He told the truth. Why blame him for what he did not do?"

Persis was energetic and agitated, and Theodore, peering out of the closet, lost nothing.

"That woman knows more than she tells," he thought. "She must even know this famous Rattlefoot. She don't look like one to be a friend of a criminal, yet she must be. She looks a bit older than Rattlefoot is said to be. Wonder if she is his sister?"

"Show me the real murderer," requested Alexander.

"Look for the man with the gray suit!" swiftly directed Persis.

Something made Theodore's gaze wander. Then he started in new alarm. Close to Persis stood the chair he had lately used, and over its back hung his forgotten, tell-tale gray coat. Danger pressed close upon him.

CHAPTER XL

THE GRAY COAT.

Consternation filled the mind of the hiding man. Both he and Alexander had overlooked the gray coat when he fled so hastily to the closet, and there it still was, spread out to the eyes of the visitor.

Theodore was frightened. True, there were many other gray coats in the city of New York, but it was equally true that Persis Gordon's mind was bent, not on the others, but on that special coat that now lay where she could see it the moment she chanced to cast her gaze that way.

"She will see it; she will question Alexander; she will suspect that I am here; she will betray me—yes, and betray Alexander!"

Thus ran the current of his thoughts, and he was worried more than ever. He wished Persis miles away—but she was just there.

"The man in gray," pursued the woman, "is the guilty person. How can it be otherwise? The evidence is complete."

"You have said all this before," reminded the detective.

"I have more to say now."

"Proceed."

"I am sure I should know him if I were to see him. I have lately noticed a man skulking around the Warrington residence. He exactly fits the description of the man in gray. I had forgotten him, but I shall not forget again. I shall know him when I see him. Yes, and I will see him, if I hunt all New York over. I'll find him; I'll bring him to the electric chair!"

Vehemently she spoke, and Theodore shivered in his hiding place. He had more than once passed Warrington's house as she claimed, and he did not doubt that he was the man she had seen.

"Once let her get her eyes on me and I am lost," he thought. "Yes, and Alexander will be disgraced, too."

It was a hopeful sign in the life of the wayward brother that he thought more of Alexander than himself, but he would gladly have been free from the necessity of worrying about the detective.

Alexander seemed to be upset momentarily by Mrs. Gordon's fierceness, but he was soon himself.

"It seems that you want to put a man to death whose only known offense is that he walked past your house."

"But I tell you it was the man who killed Captain Oliver!" reiterated Persis.

"Where is the proof?"

"I have none."

"You seem to be following a shadow. Granted that James Black thinks he did see a man slip out of the front door, it is very unlikely that he was the same who walked past your house. Granted, again, that there was a second man at Warrington's, how does that excuse our prisoner, Rattlefoot? Were they not?"

"No, no! The prisoner is innocent."

"Why do you feel so much interest in him?" bluntly demanded the detective.

"I feel an interest in justice."

"Who is Rattlefoot?"

"How should I know?"

"He must have an identity, a name, friends."

"I do not know him," hastily asserted Persis.

"Then how can you declare him innocent with so much confidence, when all the aspects of the case accuse him?"

The housekeeper's gaze wavered and

fell, but she made a desperate attempt to be calm.

"Because I am sure the man in gray is the guilty one."

"That's your only evidence, for or against the two men?"

"Ye-es," was the reluctant answer.

"Let us turn the light of logic on the matter. There is a cry of alarm in the Warrington house, and a man is seen—so it is claimed, though there is no proof—a man is seen leaving the house. Not a very serious affair, especially as it is not proven. On the other hand, another man is found struggling with Captain Oliver, and the murdered man dies with his grasp on this other man—Rattlefoot. Against which person does the evidence point the more strongly?"

Persis looked confused, but presently she tossed her head with angry defiance of logic.

"I don't care; the proof is as much against one as the other. No, it is the more against him who ran than the one who stayed to face the danger—"

"Held by Captain Oliver," dryly reminded Alexander.

"You are unjust, prejudiced, bound to hang an innocent man!" cried Persis, warmly. "Detective-like, you fix your gaze all upon one point and ignore everything else. I tell you, if you want to get the right man, look for a person in gray. Look for a man who owns a coat like this!"

Persis had just begun to use her eyes. She now moved suddenly forward and seized Theodore's coat, lifting it from its resting place on the back of the chair. With this held aloft she again confronted the detective, and he had nothing to say. Cool as he was, this abrupt and dramatic exhibition of the forgotten garment was too much for his nerves.

Theodore peered out of the closet and his heart throbbed rapidly. He almost expected the coat to take on supernatural qualities and cry out: "My owner is in the closet, and he is the man you suspect so positively!" But if fear aroused thought of the impossible, it did not remove reasonable danger.

Finding that Alexander did not speak, the woman allowed her gaze to fall to the garment she held.

"Just about such a coat as this!" she repeated. "It is very much like, color and style. Look for a man with a coat like this!"

"But, madam," Alexander managed to say, "there are hundreds of men in New York who wear coats like that."

"There are few just like it—very few."

"A tailor would say different."

"I speak not of a tailor, but of the man who killed Richard Oliver. You quibble, twist, turn, and are useless. Be sagacious! Let me suppose myself a detective in your place. This coat would be sufficient for me to hunt down the murderer!"

"That coat?"

"Yes. I would hold it up—so! I would say, 'Here is the coat of the man who killed Captain Oliver. Where is the man? I must find him.' I would find him. It would be easy. Here is the coat—where is its owner?"

Persis waved the garment, and Theodore shook. He knew where its owner was. He was startled beyond composure.

Alexander, however, smiled slightly. If Persis had moved him when she spoke earlier, she did so no longer. She had dropped accusation and descended to dramatic illustration. She was now impressive, but not dangerous.

"You will pardon me," he quietly replied, "but this is not a theater, nor do I care to have my coat figure in such a way. My wardrobe was not made for that purpose."

Persis cast the garment away.

"Useless thing!" she added; "let it go. Mr. Leland, I wish you to be wise, active and reasonable in this case."

"A modest request," he agreed, with covert sarcasm. "I will heed your orders, madam."

"I came here to try to open your eyes; to spur you on to swift exertion in the right direction. I hope I have made an impression."

"She has!" muttered Theodore.

"I see certain things very clearly," responded Alexander.

"And you will act?"

"Yes."

"And not forget the man in gray?"

"I'll remember him."

"Can you find him?"

"I think it possible."

"Do you think he has fled the city?"

"Very likely not."

"He may be even near us now."

"That is too much to hope," hastily answered the detective, "but we may well suppose him still in New York. There is no other place in America so well suited for hiding purposes. In this wide stretch of houses one may secrete himself and sink into nothingness, as far as the outside world is concerned. He would naturally hide here, if guilty, but it will avail little in the end—the death of Captain Oliver must be avenged."

He was talking against time, to turn Persis from dangerous topics. He had succeeded, for she only paused to renew her exhortation to activity in the one direction to which she was pleased to direct her suspicions, or claims of suspicion—then she moved toward the door, and Theodore breathed freer.

A few words more and she passed the threshold. The door closed behind her, and the brothers were clear again.

Alexander went quickly to the closet.

"I am going out," he announced. "Do you stay here. Change your clothing, and put on a dark suit of mine. Remain quiet until I come back, and open the door to nobody."

"Going out?" echoed Theodore, anxiously. "Why? Where?"

"To follow the woman. She said she hoped she had made an impression. She had! I told her I saw certain things clearly. I do see them. She must, she does know Rattlefoot. I go to dog her steps now!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PURSUIT OF PERSIS.

A few minutes later Alexander passed out of the house. He had reasoned that if Persis was interested in Rattlefoot, as seemed likely, she would use all possible caution in the way of discovering whether she was suspected in return for her efforts in his behalf.

Alexander intended to give her time, and he took his first steps out of doors with this thought in mind. Yet, it was his purpose to get sight of her again, and he soon succeeded.

She was walking swiftly down the street.

"Ah!" he murmured, "her course is not toward home. I am glad I came out."

She moved on, and he pursued with skill. She did not look back, but he was ready for such a thing. Minutes were consumed in the chase. Street-cars passed her, but she gave heed to none of them. Straight ahead she went, relying only on her own strong feet, and thus the detective was taken many blocks.

Finally she stopped short. Before her was a hotel, a building not new to Alexander. It was, to his knowledge, one of that class which have a fixed trade and look no further than their friends and regular guests for patronage, and in such patrons draw from a class that hover between freedom and State's prison, always dangerously near the latter, in spite of the wearing of good clothes, and not infrequently inmates of the cells at Sing Sing.

Persis had a respectable appearance, and it would have surprised Alexander to see her apply there had he not seen Rattlefoot.

The accused man seemed to be exactly of the class that patronized the hotel.

Persis hesitated. Whether she knew the class of people that frequented the hotel, or merely dreaded the work in hand, was not certain, but she manifested reluctance. Overcoming it with a strong effort, she walked quickly forward and entered the building.

The detective did not allow her to

have much the start of him; he followed, taking all possible pains to avoid being seen by her.

There was an entrance for ladies, and Persis used it, but, instead of pursuing the way up the stairs, she made use of the side-door from the hall and boldly entered the clerk's room.

Three or four flashily-dressed men were lounging there, but she gave them only one glance and then went to the desk. She said something to the clerk that Alexander did not hear, and that official promptly replied:

"I think he is. Boy, show the lady to Room 53."

And then the detective saw her escorted up the stairs by the boy in uniform.

It was a time when Alexander needed to do some quick thinking. He thought, and then walked to the desk himself. Nodding to the clerk with the air of an old acquaintance, he inquired:

"What can you give me for to-night on the second floor?"

He did not know which floor Persis was going to, but he believed he could learn by the numbers, and he took a safe way of getting what he wanted.

"I can give you a good room," began the clerk, but Alexander interrupted quietly:

"I know something about the rooms—I've been here before. What rooms are vacant?"

"Fifty-one, seven, nine and sixty-three."

"Give me fifty-one, please. It will suit me to a dot."

There was no objection, so Alexander registered under an assumed name and accepted the guidance of a bell-boy. In a short time he was on the second floor and in the number assigned to him. He got rid of the boy as soon as possible and then looked to his situation.

He had hoped that he would find a double room, with a transom leading to the next number, but the transom was not there, nor was there any connecting door.

His first idea was that he was totally baffled, for he could hear nothing through a solid wall, but he soon discovered more. Drawing a chair to the wall he used his knife and quickly made an opening through a thin barrier of paper. In brief, there was an opening for a stovepipe in cold weather, and, though this had been closed, it was the easiest thing in the world to cut the obstacle away.

He looked further. There was exactly the same state of affairs in the next room, and when he had used the knife once more he had an avenue through which came the sound of voices very distinctly.

He heard a man speak.

"I repeat," he was saying, "that I do not know you. You must explain who you are before I can talk with you."

"Have I not given you reason to talk?" a woman replied.

"You speak mysteriously about an alleged brother of mine being in trouble. If you were sincere you would come to the point at once."

"I was trying to break it to you gently."

"Never mind the gently!" was the impatient exclamation. "If you know anything, out with it. I'm no chicken!"

It was the blunt, irritable exclamation of a man destitute of fine feelings. Alexander could not see him through the aperture, and he was ignorant of his identity. The woman he easily recognized as Persis.

"My information may be more terrible than you suspect," she persisted. "I have said that I have bad news of your brother."

"But you have also said that he was alive and not injured. Then there can be nothing so very killing. But—is he arrested?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"Prepare yourself—"

"I say I am no chicken! Out with it! Arrested for what?"

"Murder!"

"What!"

There was a sound as if the man had

leaped to his feet, and the listener could well believe he would say no more about his lack of similarity to a "chicken."

"He is in prison charged with that crime," pursued Persis. "Have you not read the newspapers?"

"Yes, but the only murder I've noticed there recorded is that where a brute named Rattlefoot killed a sleeping man—"

"Rattlefoot is your brother!"

"What's that?"

"Rattlefoot is your brother!"

"Woman, you lie!" was the hot retort.

"I speak the truth!" responded Persis. "If you doubt me, look for yourself. Go where he is, in prison. See him! Then deny it if you will. I come to you with no unworthy motive, but to announce the terrible truth, for his friends must help him. Ay, you must work your best or he is a doomed man."

"My brother?"

"Yes. Rattlefoot is Charles Davidson."

"I should have known of it before if it were he."

"Do you not see he has kept his secret in order to shield his friends? Don't you see he is innocent, and that he relies on that fact to carry him through? But it will not suffice. A bloodhound of the law has the case to deal with, and he will carry it through to the end, unless you act with zeal. Up! Work! Save Charles Davidson or he is lost!"

There was a brief pause, and then the unknown man broke forth:

"It is amazing, incredible, awful, but your face tells me that you know what you allege."

"I do know it."

"My brother under arrest, charged with murder. He, child of my own parents, and the boy I played with in childhood in the old Sixth Ward! Why, this is enough to madden me!"

"It must be more. It must make you struggle to save him."

"Save him! Why, I'll kill the man who would do him injury! The hounds of law must loosen their fangs. They must—they shall! That boy shall not suffer—is my brother!"

"He is not guilty!" asserted Persis, evidently pleased to find so emphatic a sympathizer.

"I don't care a rap whether he is guilty or not; I'll help him all the same, and stand by him to the end. Yes, he's my brother, you know, and I'm ready to fight like a tiger."

"But he cannot be guilty—"

"Guilty? Of course not! Who says he is? He isn't the man to do such a thing—he's as white as a man as there is in all New York. Poor Charles! So he's in trouble? Well, here's somebody that will make the men who accuse him smart for their work!"

"We want to establish his innocence—"

"Of course he is innocent. Who says otherwise? He is my brother—the same blood flows in his veins that's in mine, and I'll stand by him while I live!"

Alexander listened in mute interest. He, too, had a brother, and he could understand a part of the unseen speaker's feelings—not all, for the brother at liberty would not be at that hotel as a guest if he was an honest man himself, and he had just declared that he did not care whether Charles was innocent or guilty. Evidently law and honor did not cut much of a figure, but fraternal ties did.

Like Alexander, he had a brother, to fight for then.

"What can we do for him?" pursued Persis.

"Much, everything! We will have the help of lawyers, and, if need be, of law-breakers—there are men who can cut and kill in New York. But, see here, woman, who the dickens are you, anyhow?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER'S MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.

Rattlefoot's brother broke off suddenly, and there was suspicion in his voice. He had just been impressed with one part of the case.

"Who are you?" he repeated.

"I am one who wants justice," answered Persis Gordon.

"I never saw you before."

"No."

"What is your name?"

There was a pause, and then came the reply, reluctant in every syllable.

"My name is Mrs. Gordon."

"What? Didn't the newspapers say the housekeeper at Warrington's bore that name?"

"I am the housekeeper."

"See here! Is this a trap? Why are you here? If this is true, are you nosing around as a spy?"

"Be still, sir!" was the resentful interruption. "I am not here with any ignoble motive. I believe Charles Davidson to be innocent, and I have come to warn you of his danger; more, I have come as a friend."

"If I doubted you fully—"

There was intense passion in Davidson's voice, and Alexander Leland grew so deeply interested that he managed to raise himself higher until he could look into the next room. He saw that the man there was facing Persis belligerently, but the outraged sincerity and dignity expressed in her face quelled his turbulent spirit. His clinched hand dropped to his side.

"Well, well, I reckon it's all right," he muttered, "but you—who are you? I never heard Charles mention you, and I don't know you. Why do you side with him?"

"For justice's sake."

"Humph!"

"I believe him innocent."

"Why?"

Persis was only too glad to tell, and she poured out the story of the man in gray with feverish interest. Her companion watched and listened, but his brow grew darker. He was a man of the world, and he knew very well that a woman's conviction would never set a man free. Charles was in prison, and the evidence was strong against him.

He allowed Mrs. Gordon to talk herself out, and then eyed her critically.

"You say you do not know Charles?"

"That is true."

"Then how the dickens came you here? All the rest of New York is wondering who the mysterious 'Rattlefoot' is, but you just trot over here and announce that my brother is in difficulty. How did you know his name was Charles Davidson—how did you know I was his brother?"

He was curious, and so was Alexander Leland, but they did not get the explanation. Instead, Persis seemed very much embarrassed, and it was some time before she recovered power of speech.

"I—I found a card," she presently faltered.

"What sort of a card?"

"A visiting card. It had his name on it, and yours, too. They were written there, you see."

Alexander shook his head, unbelievably, and Davidson was not more credulous. Falsehood was painted all over Persis's face; it shone in her eyes; it governed her movements.

"Gammon!" commented her companion. "That won't go down. Say! I want this made more clear. I am Hugh Davidson; that's sure. I have a brother Charles, though where he is I don't know. If he is Rattlefoot—the mysterious unknown who is the talk of the town—how in blazes did you know his name, or that I was his brother? Come, no more squeechners—tell the truth!"

Persis hesitated for a moment; then she replied, sullenly:

"I refuse to answer."

"You do, eh?"

"Yes."

"I want no such riddle to feed on."

"I decline to tell how I knew this. Suffice it to say I knew and came. The whys of it are immaterial and trifling. I have told you of your brother's great peril. Will you fight for him?"

"To the death!" cried Hugh.

"It will take great sagacity."

"I'll use it, then."

"There is a detective on his track who believes him guilty and will do his utmost to convict him."

"Let the scoundrel look to himself!"

exclaimed Davidson, hotly, his eyes blazing with anger. "I'll kill him in some dark street, if he seeks to do Charles harm."

"He may not do anything viciously, but he has a fixed opinion, so do not let him work ill to your brother."

"I say that the detective who would do him ill shall die for it!" cried the previous speaker. "Charles is my brother; I'll fight his battles to the end. Why shouldn't I? I know him to be innocent. He is incapable of injuring anybody, but if he had injured a score of men—yes, killed them all—I would still fight for him. He's my brother!"

Hugh Davidson's vehemence, his persistent repetition of the word which indicated the tie between himself and the accused man, his whole manner—in various ways Alexander read his devotion to Rattlefoot, and he was impressed by it all.

He and Hugh were alike in that each had a brother under suspicion, and, while his belief in Rattlefoot's guilt was not shaken, he could not help feeling for the man.

Still, Hugh was not a pleasing person to look at. He had not the look of a gentleman or honest man. He was well-formed, but mingled with reddish-colored hair and a red face, he had the air of a sport and a tricky man about town.

He was flashy, reckless, and none too conscientious, if signs went for anything.

The interview was about over. Persis could add but little to what she had already said, and she had disturbed Davidson's peace of mind seriously.

He did not demur when she spoke of going, and it was clear that he felt the need of being alone to think the affair over, but she was not ready to go until she had tried to gain some consolation.

"You will get the best of legal and detective talent for him, will you not?" she asked.

"Yes," promised Davidson.

"He will need it. Innocent though he is, he is in great danger when the law gets its iron grasp upon him."

"Perdition take the law!" exclaimed Hugh.

"It is usually just," answered Persis, her better nature coming to the front, "but not now. Of course, the man in gray is the real criminal."

"Of course."

"Find him, and you'll start the movement that will free Charles."

"I will find him!" cried Davidson. "New York is not big enough to hide him from me. The case is clear enough. A murrain on these police idiots who will not see it. Find the man in gray? Ay, that I will, even if I have to make a house-to-house canvass of all the city. I'll hunt him down; I'll send him to the gallows!"

He spoke with bitter energy, and Alexander Leland frowned his disapproval of such a programme.

"He is my brother!" added Davidson, his harsh voice suddenly growing softer.

Alexander's features relaxed. Deeply did this phase of the man's argument impress him. He, too, had a brother—an erring brother. He could feel for Hugh in that way; he did feel for him, but it did not make him reconciled to the plan which would place Theodore in prison in place of Rattlefoot.

"Now you talk nobly," approvingly declared Persis. "See that you do not lose your zeal. Work hard! Use your hands, limbs and brains! Be active, and let sagacity rule your every thought and act."

She moved toward the door, but again Davidson opened up a subject which perplexed him.

"See here!" he exclaimed; "what is your interest in this thing? Do you know Charles?"

"I have told you that I do not."

"Then why this interest?"

"Justice demands that I—"

"Excuse me, but that is nonsense. As an inmate of Warrington's house your sympathies would naturally go the other way. You have some strong object in taking Charles's part. What is it?"

"I have told you. Let us drop the subject, if you don't believe me," she curtly replied.

"But if you are his friend I want to know it. Have you ever met him in the past, when—"

"Never!"

Persis moved again and laid her hand on the knob of the door.

"But your conduct is extraordinary—"

"Then it will remain so. Good-day!"

She turned the knob; the door opened to her touch, and she passed out into the hall. Davidson seemed about to speak again, but she gave him no chance. She closed the door behind her, and her steps in the hall told of rapid retreat.

The detective kept his position. He thought there was no further need of following her then, and he wanted to see a little more of Mr. Hugh Davidson.

Evidently the latter soon forgot Persis, and graver thoughts crowded to his mind. He fell into deep thought, and his knit brows told that his meditations were not pleasant.

"So Charley has got into trouble?" he muttered, anon. "I always told him we should both wind up in Sing Sing, but he played a mild game and I, one of piping boldness—I never thought he would be the first to go. But this charge against him; I can't believe that he killed Captain Oliver. With all his breaks to make a living, he never showed signs of anything so desperate as this. Still, if he broke in to rob and was caught at it by Oliver—Where is the newspaper?"

He began to toss over a pile of papers that lay on the table, and finally selected one and began to read with avidity.

"There is nothing for me to do here," thought Alexander.

He replaced the cut wall-paper as well as possible, and then stepped down. He was done at the hotel, and he speedily sought the outer air. He saw nothing of Persis.

Something had been gained by the events of the last two hours. Unless Mrs. Gordon was very much mistaken, he knew just who Rattlefoot was, and that was a good deal. He wanted to know more, and believed the way was open to do it.

He knew the police patrolman on that beat, and knew him, too, to be a shrewd and experienced man. He sought for the officer and promptly came to business.

"How much do you know about the guests of the hotel over there?"

"Much!" the patrolman answered. "It is not the highest class place in New York."

"Know anybody there named Davidson?"

"You bet I do. Hugh, his name is."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Rapid! Dresses well, and seems to get money without work. Has all of the characteristics of a man about town. Drives a fast horse, keeps the elbows of his coat a bit shiny by leaning so much on the hotel bar. Drinks much, but never gets full. You know the sort. Low life in New York reeks with them."

"Has he relatives?"

"One, at least; a brother named Charles."

"What of him?"

"Do you see my two hands?"

"Yes."

"Alike, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"That's because they are mates. Hugh and Charles are alike."

"Are they criminals?"

"Now you have me; I don't know. Take the well-dressed bar-room frequenters of the city who keep out of the hands of the law, and shake them up, and they would make a composite Davidson brothers. I don't know that they are law-breakers, but they go a mighty fast clip."

The detective nodded. He knew his men now.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOMETHING ABOUT RATTLEFOOT.

In a dingy, shabby room, near the roof of a Hudson Street house, a woman of middle age sat sewing. There was a knock at the door. She bade the applicant enter, and when the door opened she saw a man whose appearance was so aristocratic, in her estimation, that she grew

agitated. He, however, bowed politely, and spoke without delay.

"Mrs. Temple?"

"Dear me, yes; that's my name, sir," she replied.

"Is Miss Aola Oliver here?"

"She has been, but she has gone out, just now. She will soon return, sir. Won't you sit down, sir?"

"I understand she is stopping with you."

"Yes, sir; since her—her bereavement."

"I understand. I am told, also, that you were lately housekeeper for the Olivers."

"So I was, sir, but my rheumatism got that bad I couldn't do it no longer, so here I am, sewing for a living—though dear Miss Aola do be just about supporting me, and she would keep me at the house if I would be a charity patient, but I won't do that."

"You must have known the friends of the Olivers?"

"I did that, sir."

"Ever hear of a man called Charles Davidson?"

"Him?" cried Mrs. Temple, with a sniff of disapproval. "Don't be calling him a friend of the family—Miss Aola would scorn to know him. And she did send him off a-packing, sir."

"Dismissed him, eh?"

"Well, as to that, he was never taken in as a friend. Miss Aola met him somewhere, and he fell in love with her. He tried to get into her good graces, but she wouldn't have it so. She just saw right through the flashy, good-for-nothing fellow, and he wasn't took in, sir, at all."

"Where is he now?"

"Well, sir," replied Mrs. Temple, with satisfaction expressed on her face, "the last thing I saw of him he was moving toward the street impelled by the toe of poor, dear Captain Dick Oliver's boot."

"Was it so bad as that?"

"He wouldn't take 'No' from Miss Aola, so the captain had to kick him out. Davidson was sassy, and that's what he got. Yes, the captain did kick him hard."

"Where is Davidson now?"

"None of us have seen him since. I suppose he is making himself a living picture in bar-rooms. That was his customary pursuit. He was a bad man, and I wouldn't want him to get so mad at me as he did at the captain. He swore that he would be avenged on him, and I just told the captain he would yet do him mischief—"

Mrs. Temple stopped short, and her face took on a strange, scared expression.

"What is it?" the visitor asked.

"The description of the man in the newspaper!" whispered the woman, with agitation.

"What man?"

"The one who killed the poor captain."

"What of him?"

"Why, the way the newspapers describe him, he is just like Charles Davidson! Reddish-colored hair and mustache, red face, and a big man of rather fine form, you know. It's just like him!"

Mrs. Temple trembled so that her sewing fell from her lap, and her face paled perceptibly.

"Very much alike, eh?"

"The description fits, sir. It's him; I know it's him!" cried the woman, excitedly. "Didn't I tell them, too? Didn't I say, 'Look out for Davidson! He'll do ye a mischief!'"

"Has it never occurred to Miss Aola that the murderer of her father might be Davidson?" asked the visitor.

"What?"

It was a new voice by the door, and as the visitor turned he saw Aola herself. She had entered unheard, and the last words had been overheard. Plainly, she was deeply moved by them.

"Mr. Leland, what is this?" she cried.

"Be calm, Miss Oliver—"

"Speak! What do you mean? What of Davidson?" she demanded.

"I am informed that the man under arrest is Charles Davidson."

"A burglar! I am not surprised!"

"Is he not more?"

"What?"

"I am told that Captain Oliver had to

punish Davidson for annoying you. Is not the motive of his deed plain?"

Aola stood inactive, her expression one of earnest thought. A pause followed; then she emphatically replied:

"It might be, if the prisoner was the one who killed my father. But he was not the one. Elias Warrington did the deed!"

"Do you persist in this?"

"To the end. It was the work of that cool, bloodless monster—that fiend who masks his villainy under an exterior of mildness fit for a saint. The prisoner may be Charles Davidson; it is very likely he is; but it was Warrington who slew my father!"

Confident and stubborn was the assertion, and Alexander Leland had nothing to say. His own heart had been lighter when he came to see her than at any time since the murder. He had found a motive for the murder, he thought, and all things pointed to Charles Davidson. He felt relief that it was so, for each thread of evidence served to make less probable the fear that Theodore had been concerned in the work.

Alexander had not been prepared for continued denial on Aola's part, and it annoyed him.

"Talk as you will," she added, "I am fixed in my belief. You will waste time by trying to convict the man you have made prisoner. Fix your attention on Warrington; devote all your energy to finding out his part in it. He planned the whole thing, and he either struck the blow or hired somebody else to do it. Remember the man in gray!"

Alexander winced. He did not like these persistent allusions to the man in gray.

"Miss Oliver, are you logical?" he asked.

"I hope so."

"To whom does the known evidence in this case point as the guilty man?"

"To Elias Warrington."

The detective made a gesture of impatience, but he did not again ask Aola if she was logical. The point had been settled.

"If you want to get an insight to Warrington's peculiar methods," the girl resumed, presently, "find one of my father's sailors whose name is Josh Rockaway. I have spoken of him to you before. The men who served as crew on the schooner 'Merry Mary' before she was lost at sea are well scattered now. I have not found one of them, though I have just been out to look. Maybe you can find them. If you can, I beg of you to search."

"I will comply with the request, though I will frankly say that I see no hope of success in the case under consideration. I do not suspect Elias Warrington. Still, it will do no harm to see the sailors."

"Go to South Street."

"Why there? Because it is the resort of sailors?"

"Yes. I have looked there, as elsewhere, and, as I have often heard Josh talk of South Street, I am sure he will be there, unless he has again shipped."

"I will look, and something may come of it."

It was a promise given to quiet the girl, and the detective had no intention of seeking South Street immediately, while the whole matter looked like turning away from the case uselessly. If he went to the water-front, it was likely to be considerably later, he believed.

Having gained Aola's promise that she would go to police headquarters and fully identify the prisoner, the detective took his departure.

He was still worrying over Theodore, so he decided to go home, first of all, and see if everything had progressed well there, and, furthermore, to see what could be done about getting Theodore away to other quarters.

He had almost reached the house when he happened upon Teddy Tiernan. The fruit-vender stopped him eagerly.

"Begorra, you's the mon I've been lookin' fer," the searcher declared. "Anythin' new in our line?"

"What is our line?"

"Why, detective worruk, sure. I'm wi'd yez in this case, ye see."

"That's good, certainly. No, there's nothing new."

"I thought maybe you would want ter know that I've seen wan av Captain Dick's sailors, an' it's rid-hot he is against the mon that killed his old skipper."

"Where did you see him?"

"He was around by the stand, an' he stopped an' bought some peaches. My helper was goin' to give him some decayed wanes, begorra, but I seen the Jack Tar was a dacent chap, an' I stopped it; an' he was thot grateful he fill into talk wi'd me."

"What did he say?"

"He had been around to look at the house where d'e ould cap'n was killed, an' he wanted to free his moind about it all. Say, boss, av I was you I would see him."

"Did he give his name?"

"He did thot. It was Josh Rockaway."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HUNT ON SOUTH STREET.

Alexander had been listening with but little interest, but Teddy had changed all that. Whatever the detective might think of the charges made by Aola, he was not unwilling to get all possible information in regard to those concerned in the case.

"Did this Josh Rockaway say anything of interest?" he inquired.

"Say, but he was rid-hot!" declared Teddy.

"Why?"

"He says he suspects it was all a put-up job—the killin' av Captain Dick Oliver."

"What do you mean?"

"The Jack Tar thinks Captain Dick was lured in there jest to be killed, sor."

"By whom?"

"I asked him thot, but he only wagged his hi'd an' says thot he moight see fit to talk later on. Sure, I urged him to out wi'd it thin, but he was contrary."

"Where is Josh to be found?"

"Down on South Strate, sor."

"What number?"

"I asked him thot, too, but he said he had no fixed place, but thot he could be found if wanted. Iverybody knows him there, he s'd, an' thot was all."

"Humph!"

"Say, boss, lets me an' you go down thot way this evenin'. It will be a pleasant trip, an' will sorter clear our brains after too much labor av our sorrut."

Alexander meditated. The persistent appearance of the charges against Warrington had begun to make an impression on him, and he believed it would not be a loss of time to see Josh Rockaway.

"I will go," he finally murmured.

"I'll be on hand to go wi'd yez, boss!" quickly promised Teddy.

This had not been in the detective's mind, despite the previous offer, but as he looked at the scorchers' keen face, he decided that he would not make a bad companion for the trip.

"Be here at eight o'clock, then," he replied.

"Sure, you'll find me wi'd yez!" Teddy cried, in delight.

Alexander pursued his way and soon reached his own quarters. It was with apprehension that he sought his room, but he found Theodore there and all going well as far as could be seen.

"Any news?" he asked.

"I am not sure," Theodore responded. "I've seen a man pass the house twice, and I don't like his looks. He turned his gaze up this way, and I feared he might be a detective, but he has not been around since."

"I think you need not worry about that."

"Worry!" exclaimed the younger brother. "Every moment is one of worry with me. Each sound has an element of danger to my excited mind. The voice of a housemaid in the hall sets my nerves to quivering."

"You must get over this. Nobody suspects you, and as you have obeyed me and removed your gray suit—which we will get rid of to-morrow, somehow—there is no reason why you should be suspected."

"That is not all," wearily replied Theodore. "I am tortured by the self-inquiry, have I slain a man? I hate Elias Warrington, and I would gladly devote all my life to righting the wrong he did our father, but knave that he is, I would not deprive

even him of life— Providence forbid! How much worse it would be to me to slay an innocent man I cannot explain to you, but I am driven almost mad by the fear that Captain Oliver did fall by my hand!"

The speaker arose and began to pace the room excitedly.

"Be calm!" Alexander urged. "There is no proof that you did harm to him."

Theodore went to the closet and brought out the shirt he had worn during the earlier part of the day. He exposed the red stain on the sleeve.

"Here is a silent voice!" he tremulously replied.

The detective quickly arose, took the garment away, produced his knife and began to cut at the discolored part. He had soon severed it wholly from the shirt proper. Theodore watched breathlessly.

Next, Alexander cast it into the stove, and then lighted a match and applied the flame to the tell-tale cloth. It caught, and a blaze sprang up.

"Exit, dangerous spot!" he murmured.

There was a knock at the door. Alexander hastily replaced the cover of the stove, and then deliberately answered the knock. Nobody was there but a housemaid on a trivial errand, and though she looked hard at Theodore, she had nothing to say that was alarming.

She soon took her departure, and the brothers were alone again.

The detective's company was very grateful to his companion, but he did not linger a great while. He had seen the landlady and made sure that Theodore would be well taken care of, and that was all he could do for him. As for himself, duty called him elsewhere.

He went out and continued work, but he did not forget the appointment with Teddy Tiernan, and at the set hour he was at the corner. His ally was considerably ahead of him, and fairly bubbling with delight at the honor which had come to him as companion of a great detective.

They lost no time in setting out for the lower part of the city, and South Street was reached in due season.

Alexander realized that they had a task of some magnitude ahead of them. South Street was long, and the statement of Josh Rockaway that every one there knew him proved, on inquiry, to be an exaggeration. As Teddy would surely know the wanted sailor, if he was met, they wandered on in the search.

Teddy watched the long line of shipping as well as the street.

"Sure," he remarked, "it's tempted I am to go to sea me own self. Thim vessels look roight han some."

"Better not do it."

"Wan must have a poile av fun."

"If you should try it once you would thank your lucky stars when you got out of it. It's a tough life, with many a rough experience mixed in with a little of the fun you mention, and not equal to—"

Alexander stopped short, and Teddy asked:

"Not aquil to what?"

"Be still!" replied the detective, in a low tone. "I see somebody that I know."

The "somebody" of the case might have had the plural number applied with propriety, for there were two persons, though only one was really known to the speaker. He was somewhat surprised to see Hugh Davidson, while the latter's companion was an evil-looking fellow who had all the distinguishing features of a city tough.

They had just come out of an alley, and only the chance that they turned south, instead of north, prevented Alexander from being seen in return.

"Is it them?" inquired Teddy, looking correctly.

The detective did not answer. He was impressed with the belief that Davidson was not there with any ordinary object in view, and, as the foremost pair walked on quietly, Alexander moved after them.

"They're lookin' fer somebody," ventured Teddy.

"They do seem to eye men and things closely."

"Huntin' fer somebody, sure-pop! See, they let nothin' slip. If you know them it may be they're searchin' fer you."

The idea seemed wild, yet it was in Alexander's mind, too. Hugh had made threats against him. If the sport had got on the trail so quickly it surely was rapid work.

"That short feller," pursued Teddy, "looks loike a bad one fer keeps. You wouldn't want ter meet him in a dark street with ten cents in ye'r flask pocket. Reg'lar thug, he is."

"We will watch them on the quiet," replied the detective.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TALE OF THE SEA.

The pursuit was continued, but it soon ended for the time. Hugh and his tough-looking companion turned out of their course, presently, and entered a building which bore evidence of being still used for dwelling purposes.

"The fun is ended," muttered Teddy, disconsolately.

"They may soon come out. We can watch and see—"

Thus began Alexander, but Teddy suddenly uttered a new cry and darted away from his friend. He made a forward rush, and before the detective could understand why he was thus deserted, he saw the scorchers holding fast to a man in sailor dress.

"I've got him!" cried Teddy, excitedly.

The truth dawned upon Alexander, but the sailor was not so well satisfied.

"Avast, there!" he shouted. "What the howlin' tempests do ye mean by foulin' me thiswise? Cast off your anchor!"

The demand was well put, for the sailor was not succeeding in casting it off himself. He spun around in his endeavor to dislodge Teddy until the latter, being only about half of his weight, assumed a horizontal position and was whirled wildly through the air.

The detective went to the rescue.

"Be calm, sir," he requested. "My friend means no harm."

"By the luck of the Flying Dutchman, that won't go down. I know this street, an' the ways o' them who walk here. No landlubber kin rob me, now you bet yer whole kit!"

"Say, Josh Rockaway, don't yez know me?" gasped Teddy, from the air, as he spun around.

Surprised, the sailor stopped short, and Teddy broke loose and sat down on the sidewalk with considerable force.

"Say, who called my name?" demanded the big man.

"Sure," replied the scorchers, dolorously, "it was a small, still voice that is now down this way. It's meself has noticed this sidewalk is harder than me anatomy."

"Mr. Sailor," interposed Alexander, "are you Josh Rockaway?"

"Nobody else, ye'r honor. Thunder! If that sprawlin' Hottentot ain't my old mess-mate of the peanut-stand! Sorry I didn't know him first off. Here ol' feller, take my fin an' get on ye'r soles again."

Peace was restored, and Teddy accepted Josh's profuse apologies. It was made known to the sailor that Alexander wanted to see him, though nothing was said about the detective's calling.

Josh was all good nature, and he offered to lead the way to the house where he was stopping. It was on a side street, but only a few paces from South Street, and not a bad-looking place.

Alexander ordered grog for the sailor, whereupon the latter insisted upon supplying a very black pipe for his older guest. The detective thought it best to submit, though the pipe was a Samson of strength.

"We want to talk wi'd yez about the Captain Oliver murder, boss," explained Teddy, abruptly.

Alexander was troubled by this sudden introduction of their business, but the result proved that no harm had been done.

"Blaze away, my hearty!" directed Josh. "I'm ready to talk ter king or queen, wash-woman or tip-carter of the same melancholy affair. The old cap was killed foully, an' he an old salt jest like me."

"You knew him well?" questioned the detective.

"Did I? Well, I should think! Sailed with him seven v'yages, off an' on, an' a

good captain he was, though he had his weaknesses."

"Seven straight voyages, eh?"

"No. Off an' on. The first was a good fifteen year ago, an' the rest was spliced in. Never wanted ter sail under one cap'n too many year runnin'. Poor politics!"

"You were on board the 'Merry Mary'?"

"Until she sunk, ye'r honor."

"It was Captain Oliver's last cruise."

"The very last, ye'r honor, though I do believe," added Josh, lowering his voice, "that the soul o' the old man will roost on the spars o' some vessel as long as vessels sail. That's my theory—my soul never would stay at home, when I'm dead, with the yards of a clipper ship fer a restin' place. It would roam!"

"An idea worthy of consideration," agreed Alexander, with outward seriousness. "I understand that the 'Merry Mary' was lost strangely?"

"Not a bit!"

"No?"

"She was scuttled by the dogs that had a motive in doing it."

"What motive?"

"Cash!"

"How could they make cash out of it?"

Josh Rockaway leaned forward on the table and brought his face closer to that of his companion.

"Ye'r honor," he answered, "when you hear anybody say that the mystery o' the old man's death is solved, you jest say ter him that he lies. That feller who is in prison kill him? Never! Still, I won't say that—he may hev' struck the blow, but he wasn't the prime cause of it. Elias Warrington planned the job. He lured the old man in ter have him killed, an' somebody did it."

"Why do you think so?"

"Warrington put some goods on board the 'Merry Mary' an' got them insured fer more than they was worth. We was ten days out when the old man come ter me an' says, says he: 'Did you ever see any o' the cargo took off, when we was in New York, after it was put aboard?' Says I ter him 'No.' Says he ter me, 'There's crooked work here. We ain't got the cargo we was supposed ter hev'.' That's w'ot the old man says."

"And then?"

"He told me jest w'ot he meant. He said Warrington had hired him ter carry the cargo, an' it was all Warrington's. He said he had discovered that some o' the stuff was missin', an' that it must hev' been took off before we sailed."

"Captain Oliver said that?"

"He did."

"Well, what did he do?"

"He said, furthermore, that it couldn't hev' been done without the connivance o' some of the crew, an' so he suspected all o' them. He said he had good proof that Warrington had been thick with the mate, all of a sudden, just before we sailed, an' that the mate had influence with the crew more than he—the old man—had. So he said he was goin' ter be mighty still fer the time, but he was goin' ter bring Warrington up with a short pull when we got back to New York."

"The short pull seemed ter be on the other side," muttered Teddy.

"So it did, lad; so it did!" agreed Josh.

"Proceed," directed Alexander.

"Right after the old man talked with me there come up a gale, an' when it was over the 'Merry Mary' was at the bottom of the ocean."

"Foundered?"

"Humph! So went the yarn when we wanted, but this is w'ot I know: The gale was at its hardest when the old man come ter me. The schooner had been ridin' like a duck, an' all seemed serene, but when he come, his face was that white you could 'a' made it black with chalk."

"Josh," says he, tremblin', "we're scuttled!"

"Scuttled?" says I, all shook up.

"These scoundrels hev' bored us full o' holes, an' the 'Merry Mary' is doomed. She's a sieve, she is!"

"Why's that?" says I.

"Don't you see the hand of Elias Warrington?" says he. "He wasn't content with holdin' back cargo, but he was bound

ter leave no sign. His tools hev' scuttled us, an' the schooner is doomed!"

"Maybe the crew has done it all by themselves," says I.

"Bosh!" says he. "Their every interest would p'int the other way, ef they hadn't been paid fer doin' it. I tell ye Warrington had it cut an' dried before we left New York, an' these lousy dogs has only carried out his orders, as they was paid ter do. It's a success, too, fer the 'Merry Mary' is doomed!"

"Gents, she was doomed. Not ter make a long story, she foundered then an' there, an' we all had ter take to the boats. We were picked up by the sloop 'Water Wren,' John Biggs, master, an' took ter port."

"When we were on the sloop the old man held hot an' vowed he would fix Warrington. His plan was ter hev' him arrested as soon as we made New York, but he changed all that. He did some thinkin', an' then he come ter me on the dead quiet."

"Keep mum!" he ordered. "I am goin' ter go light on this. I'm a poor man, an' I want Warrington ter make good what I've lost. I'm goin' ter him an' tell him I'm on ter his game, an' make him cash over to me before I squeal on him to the authorities. I'll go right ter him as soon as we make port. He shall pay me well or there will be the blazes ter pay!"

"That's what the old man said, gents. Now, he wasn't no saint, the old man wasn't; but it was a cowardly thing that Warrington did. I make no doubt he talked soft an' nice an' induced Cap Oliver ter pass the night in his house. He did it. Yes, an' it was the old man's last night on earth. Warrington killed him!"

Josh Rockaway had become a good deal wrought up, and he poured out his story with vehemence and dramatic force. More, he ended by hitting the table a mighty thump with his big fist, and the box of tobacco jumped up and rattled against the glass that had once held the grog, but was now empty.

Alexander had listened with wrapt interest. He now spoke slowly.

"You tell a strange story."

"Strange and true."

"What about the man who was seized in Warrington's house?"

"Rattlefoot? Mebbe he told the truth; mebbe he did kill the old man, but ef he did, it was because Warrington hired him to do it!"

"Can we prove that the 'Merry Mary' sailed minus a part of her supposed cargo, and was then scuttled?"

"Barrin' my word there is no way, unless you get some o' the other members o' the crew an' make them confess."

"Where are they?"

"Gone to sea."

"In which direction?"

"Don't know, but I reckon they hev' all shipped but me."

"I hope you will not go."

"I won't leave you now, messmate. I want ter do the white thing by the old man. He was the captain I sailed under many's the year, an' I can't rest until his death is avenged. I liked him—though the old man was not all saint."

"Do you know the standing of Elias Warrington? Do you realize what it is to bring charges against a man so well known as he?—and as honest as he is reputed to be?"

"Honest!" cried Josh, scornfully. "Say, this wasn't his first essay in that line. I could tell another story equal to this—an' I would tell it, too, ef Edward Leland was alive."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STORY OF THE "GRAYHOUND."

The detective's interest suddenly increased.

"If who was alive?" he asked, his voice sounding strange.

"Edward Leland."

Teddy was looking at the detective in a puzzled way, but he saw little to enlighten him. Alexander was the officer, then, not the mere man.

"What about Edward Leland?" he inquired.

"Oh! he was another of Warrington's

victims. Queer, ain't it, that Elias, a man of retiring nature and havin' no reg'lar business, should make a foray, now an' then, inter shippin' a cargo here an' there? How many he has shipped in his day I don't know—I reckon it breaks out like the smallpox—but I do know of two cases."

"Why do you mention them in connection with this Edward Leland?"

"Say, the grass grows green over Leland—he's dead, he is."

"Well?"

"He might be alive, mebbe, only fer Elias Warrington."

"Be explicit."

"Leland gave all his money to Warrington to invest fer him—ter put inter goods that become the cargo of a vessel, by Davy Jones!—an' that vessel sunk jest as the 'Merry Mary' did, an' down with it went the cargo—an' that meant Leland's money."

Alexander looked very pale.

"Do you mean that Leland's money went into a cargo?"

"I said so, and I meant it."

"When was this?"

"Ten years ago."

"Do you speak from hearsay?"

"Bless ye, no! Wasn't I on the good ship 'Grayhound' when she went down?"

"You were?"

"Sure!"

"And Edward Leland had his money invested in the 'Grayhound'?"

"Yes."

Alexander lost control of himself and leaped to his feet.

"Prove it!" he exclaimed, excitedly.

"Eh? Hello! what's all this? Why does it stir you so?"

Josh looked suspicious and worried, and the detective saw that he had made a mistake. He was quick to seek an excuse.

"Why, man," he replied, trying to be hearty and natural of manner, "if we can prove that Warrington is in the habit of doing such things, it will be strong evidence in support of your theory."

"So it will, so it will!" agreed Josh, with much satisfaction. "I see you are a man of sense, Mr. —. I don't know ye'r name, but never mind. Well, I'll let you see whether I am bluffin'. Leland did so invest his cash—"

"Could he never recover?"

"Ah! there's the rub. As I understand it, he didn't know he had sent his riches to sea. He just handed over his coins to old Elias on the promise that they should be invested. They were, but Leland never saw the color of his ducats again."

"This is a strange story. You say you were on the 'Grayhound' on this fatal trip?"

"I was. It was a queer trip in more ways than one. The way I happened to ship on her, and so take my first voyage under Cap'n Dick Oliver was this away: I fell inter the dock down by the North River, an' would hev' drowned only that Cap'n Dick jumped in an' saved me. Now, I ain't ungrateful, an' I know a good plucky man when I see one, an' I asked permission ter ship with him. That's how I first sailed under him."

"Bless ye'r eyes, messmate, ef I hadn't been grateful ter him it would hev' been a sorry day fer the old man when we struck port again."

"Well, out went the 'Grayhound,' an' out I went with her. I won't make my yarn long, but the facts is I happened on ter some things that was queer afore we was many days out. Yes, siree. Ye see, I happened ter hear the old man an' the mate, Watkins—Yaller Joe, we called him—talkin', an' this was the upshot of it:

"They had been bought up by Elias Warrington ter do some crooked work. We didn't hev' the cargo aboard that we was supposed ter hev', an' they had been hired by Warrington ter carry on his trick."

"That much they knew, but they did some guessin', too. They knew Warrington had been havin' dealin's with one Edward Leland, an' they could guess more than that from circumstances."

"They did guess, and knowin' that Warrington had taken Leland's money ter in-

vest, they guessed Leland would never see a penny on't again. They took it as a big joke, and laughed hearty over it, but I was wrought up, an' ef I hadn't had cause ter be grateful ter the old man, I would 'a' gone straight ter the crew with what I knew. As it was, I held my tongue.

"Two days later there come up a right smart squall, an' we heaved an' tossed on the ragin' main with some considerable velocity an' kermotion, but it was only a common blow, an' we salts laughed at it.

"Say, w'ot do you think, we sprung a leak in that gale an' the 'Grayhound' went ter the bottom, cargo an' all, an' in a way the sailors allowed was mysterious.

"Messmate, I'm ready ter swear we was scuttled, an' I make no doubt that it was done by the old man designedly, by Davy Jones! Yes, siree, the 'Grayhound' was scuttled—we all knew that!"

"Knew it?" interrupted Alexander. "Could you prove it?"

"Well, no; but we all knew the water had come in queer, an' right after the old man an' Yaller Joe was down ter look at things below. I tell ye she was scuttled."

"And the cargo?"

"Lost."

"Well?"

"I went back ter New York—we was picked up from our boats, jest as we was from the 'Merry Mary'—an' I was in a funny mood. I was still grateful to the old man, but I owed somethin' ter that poor chap who had been so cheated by Elias Warrington an' the old man. I felt that I ought ter tell Edward Leland what had been done ter throw him down. Well, I hunted fer him. I found—his grave!"

"He was dead when you reached port?"

"Yes."

"Melancholy fact!" sighed Alexander.

"It was all o' that, messmate."

"Your understandin' is that Edward Leland gave his money ter Elias Warrington to invest, not knowin' how the investment was to be made; that Warrington put the money into the cargo of the 'Grayhound,' and then withheld a part of it, and that he hired Captain Oliver to scuttle the vessel—and that it was done?"

"Jes' so!"

"Then Oliver was a knave, too?"

"I'm afraid you are right. Still, he had his good p'int."

"Why didn't you tell this story when you reached port?"

"Leland was dead, an' I didn't see that he had any relations, an' though I tried ter go ter the authorities an' out with it all, I couldn't drag myself there. Cap'n Dick had saved my life—ef I blowed on him he would get sent ter prison."

Josh Rockaway was plainly sincere, in his simple-hearted way, and this did something toward mastering the strong indignation Alexander felt toward him for failing to make known the facts of the case at the time the 'Grayhound' went to the bottom of the sea. He tried to be patient and make the detective overcome the man.

"Were no suspicions aroused at the time?" he inquired.

"I never heard o' none."

"And Warrington and Oliver were successful in their game?"

"Yes."

"The scheme would fall more times than it would succeed."

"I reckon so, but old Elias seems to be dead lucky. Now, you'll see why there is ground to suspect Elias in the case of the 'Merry Mary.' He worked the old game, but didn't také Cap'n Dick inter it, so the old man was quick ter suspect the truth, an' as he lost heavy by the schooner goin' down, he was mighty mad at Elias. He swore he would see him an' get square. It seems he did go there—you know the rest."

"But is Warrington, scuttler of vessels though he is, evil enough to do murder?"

Josh Rockaway removed his pipe, rested his elbows on the table and planted his chin in his hands. He looked at Alexander in a peculiar way.

"What'r you think?" he replied.

"I want your opinion."

"You've got it."

"But you charge outright murder. Would Elias do that?"

"Messmate, how did Edward Leland die?"

There was something in Josh's manner which sent Alexander's blood to flowing rapidly.

"How did he die?"

"Murdered by Elias Warrington."

"What?"

Sharply the single word left the detective's lips, and he bounded to his feet in excitement.

"Murdered!" repeated Rockaway.

"Man, do you know what you are saying?"

"I never go off unless I'm loaded," stubbornly answered the sailor. "I say that Elias murdered Edward Leland."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DARK CRIME.

Alexander's face was very pale. He stood erect, towering above Josh Rockaway, and trembling with excitement. Truly, the detective in his nature had succumbed to the man. The sailor kept his seat and was doggedly calm.

"I'm in fer it," he added, in a husky voice. "I've kept it still for ten years, but it's out now."

"Sir," Alexander returned, in unsteady tones, "you have made a serious charge. Surely, you would not do this lightly. You say that Elias Warrington killed Edward Leland. How do you know? Where is the proof? Tell me all! Speak!"

His deep feeling worried Josh somewhat, but the latter proceeded on the line he had marked out.

"I'll tell all I can," he responded. "I can't prove it, but you shall hear an' see fer yourself. I don't know what come up between Warrington an' his dupe after the 'Grayhound' sailed, but mebbe Leland got track of the swindle."

"What did happen was this: Warrington took Leland away from the house where he had been makin' his home, an' to a new place o' residence. There he quickly fell ill an' died. It was given out that the trouble was some tropical fever, an' nobody ever suspected the truth but one man."

"That one man was Cap'n Dick Oliver. When he got home ter New York, after the 'Grayhound' was lost, he made a call on some old friends o' his, an' it proved ter be the house where Edward Leland died. They told him all about it. Leland had been dead a month or more, so he couldn't know nothin' but the evidence."

"The old man was told jest how Leland was in his sickness, an' he was impressed with some thoughts he thought."

"A few months before that Warrington was on board his vessel, an' he showed him a bottle o' stuff he had got in the tropics. It was a deadly drug used by the natives fer evil purposes. He told Warrington all about it, an' how it would throw folks inter a fever an' kill them."

"Elias was much interested, an' he asked fer some o' the fluid. He claimed he was a scientific feller, an' wanted ter experiment with the stuff on cats an' dogs. Cap'n Dick gave him half o' the bottleful o' the p'ison."

"Now, when Cap'n Dick was told how Leland was when he was sick he recognized the symptoms of p'isonin' by the drug, an' a suspicion come inter his mind."

"He believed Warrington has p'isoned Leland."

"He asked ef any bottles o' medicines remained, but, of course, all had been chucked away fer fear o' contamination. One fact was brought out by his questionin'—he knew jest what ter ask, ye see, fer he knew the drug well."

"One of the bottles found in Leland's room had been empty, but fer half o' the way up the glass was colored a red as bright as a cranberry stain."

"That was jest the way that the tropical drug did, an' he knew then that Warrington had killed Leland. You see, Leland must hev' got suspicious of Elias, or he somehow made himself dangerous. Elias settled all that by murderin' him!"

Alexander was looking in horror at the speaker.

"And did Captain Oliver say nothing of this?" the detective demanded, excitedly.

"He couldn't. He had scuttled the 'Gray-

hound' fer Warrington, an' he was pretty deep in the mire himself. I said at the start that the old man wasn't no angel."

"But how did you know of this?"

"Right from the start I suspected that the old man knew a good deal about somethin' crooked an' horrible. He wasn't no demon, an' he worried over his secret. He was nervous, morose an' down-hearted, an' that meant somethin'. But it was eight years before the old man let me inter the secret. Then he was sick on a v'yage, an' he thought he was goin' ter die, an' he sent fer me an' confessed the whole business about the drug an' his suspicions—but he didn't die, an' so he made me swear secrecy."

"There's the story, an' I'm glad I've let it out. Now, what do you think o' Elias Warrington?"

The detective's eyes seemed to blaze with fierce emotion.

"Think!" he cried, wildly. "The man is a fiend."

"Right!"

"Murdered, murdered!" groaned Alexander.

"Never mind. Edward Leland was nothin' ter you!"

"Nothing?" cried the detective. "He was my father!"

Josh Rockaway leaped up, his face the picture of startled wonder.

"Your father!" he gasped.

"Yes, my unfortunate father!" repeated Alexander, intensely. "Do you think it is nothing to me now?"

"You—you—What is your name?"

"Alexander Leland."

"His son? Have you come here to spy upon me? Are you houndin' me because I haven't told this afore? Am I accused, too? Ef this is a plot, ef you have wormed this out o' me with the intention o' bringin' me ter prison as an accessory—"

Big Josh clinched his hands and confronted the detective with savage impetuosity.

"Well, what?" demanded Alexander.

The sailor was like a tiger crouched for a spring, but his mood suddenly changed. His tense muscles relaxed, and his hands fell nerveless to his side. His face softened.

"No, no!" he muttered; "I wouldn't do ye harm. I deserve some punishment, mebbe, fer not speakin' out, an'—why, you're his son. You do right ter look inter it. Ef I had a father who had been used so I would sacrifice my best friend ter square the account. Messmate, my confession is out. Ef ye want to make use of it, go on. I'll be a passive prisoner."

"I do not want to harm you. I have not come as a spy, nor to trap or injure you. I never thought to hear this story. I have heard it, though, and—"

The detective paused for a moment; then he deeply added:

"There are those with whom I have an account to square!"

"Who?"

"Elias Warrington."

"Good, good! Go on! Go ahead, lad, an' I'll back ye up all I kin. I'll tell my story, in court or out, an' it will make merry music fer Warrington."

"I have known he was a scoundrel," pursued the detective, "but I did not dream it was as bad as this. Murdered! My poor father, my poor father!"

He paced the narrow limits of the room with quick, excited steps, his face betraying his deep emotion.

"What will you do?" repeated Josh.

Alexander turned in his rapid walk and then went quickly to the sailor's side. Josh was an old hand in danger, but he moved a little back from the look bent upon him.

"I will never rest," answered the son of Edward Leland, "until this wrong has been righted. My way will be the way of law—I'll hunt Warrington down; I'll place him in the felon's dock; I'll see him go to his deserts, but all within the limits of law."

"Tackle him on the Cap'n Dick Oliver case," suggested Josh.

"I do not believe his hand sent Oliver out of the world."

"No?"

"No?"

"Every officer in New York believes it!"

"Wrong! I am an officer; I am the detective in the case, and I do not believe it. I hold Warrington guiltless of striking that blow. He may have instigated it, and may not. I don't believe he struck the blow."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BLOW FROM THE ENEMY.

The sailor looked puzzled.

"Why," he answered, "I should think you would want to believe all you could against Elias Warrington."

"It is not what I want, but what I do believe. My judgment tells me that we must look beyond Warrington to solve the mystery of the death of Captain Dick Oliver."

"Then I've talked all for nothin'!" muttered Josh, irritably.

"Not all for nothing, sir," the detective assured. "It is much to know what you have told me about Oliver's relations with Warrington. In the story there is food for thought, and I will not neglect the opportunity it vouchsafes us."

Josh Rockaway was not able to look at matters in this light, but he let it drop.

Alexander's mind persisted in dwelling upon the other story he had heard—that which related to his father—but he tried to be the steadfast detective, and asked other questions of the sailor.

There was little more to be learned, however, and the interview drew near an end. The detective parted from his new acquaintance, after securing his promise that he would keep himself within call until released from the promise by Alexander.

Teddy Tiernan had been very quiet for some time. As he expressed it, the interview had become too deep for him, and he was wise enough not to meddle. As they passed the outer door, though, his usual mood returned.

"Say, we've been in that place a good long while, ain't we?"

"It is late."

"The strates are deserted, an' it's darker than a black cat's off-shoulder."

"Never mind. We shall soon get where it is lighter. We will go direct to the elevated road, and that is not much of a walk."

"What of somebody should jump on the collars av our dress suits?"

"Are you afraid?" asked Alexander, with a faint smile.

"I'm afraid d'ey won't do it!" replied Teddy, with a grin.

"We can do without it."

"Or w'd it."

Exchanging these trivial comments, they managed to keep their minds from other subjects in a measure, and Alexander, for one, had still other matters to employ his thoughts. He became wholly unconscious of everything around him, and right there lay a danger.

The two allies were passing the mouth of an alley, when suddenly two dark forms shot out as if from a cannon. They precipitated themselves against the detective, and he would have fallen but for the fact that he bumped against Teddy and thus checked his impetus.

"Look out!" cried the scorchers.

Alexander did not need to ask why. Feeble as the lamp light was, he caught the gleam of something no stranger to him, and he made an agile leap to one side. A knife passed so close to his breast that a gash was cut in his coat.

"Thugs!" added Teddy, tersely.

The two men who had made the assault had been baffled in their first attempt, but they were not discouraged. They pressed the attack, and Alexander saw that both were armed and bound to do mischief. He had no intention of becoming a victim, so he acted accordingly. His revolver was drawn with remarkable celerity.

"Back!" he warned, sharply. "Back, or I fire!"

What they would have done about the matter must remain uncertain, for just then Teddy Tiernan came into the game. He had no weapon, but he had means of making himself useful that nothing could take away but nature.

He lowered his head and dashed into the pair like a battering-ram, uttering a sort of war-whoop as he did so.

He reached the mark, and as his hard head struck one of the assailants in the side, that person went over like a ten-pin. He struck the sidewalk with a resounding thump.

"Oh! Is it foight yous want?" shrilly cried Teddy. "If d'at is your size, jest you come on. I'm w'd yez ivery toime!"

He had created a diversion, but the fallen man came up with unexpected quickness. He was mad with rage, too, and as he faced about Alexander recognized Hugh Davidson.

Rattlefoot's brother was not down South Street way for nothing.

"At them!" he gasped, fiercely. "Grip your knife! At them!"

He leaped forward, and the detective found himself reduced to the choice of headlong flight with a man and a knife at his back, or the resort of using his revolver.

He pressed the trigger. A wild yell arose from the second of the assailants.

"I'm done fer!" he lamented "I'm shot!"

Alexander turned the revolver upon Davidson, who had escaped the first shot by some chance.

"For the last time," cautioned the officer. "I tell you to keep back. Halt, or I fire!"

The second man stumbled and fell with a dismal repetition of his complaint that he was shot, and Davidson seemed suddenly to decide that he had seen enough of the affair.

He wheeled; he ran like a grayhound; he flashed along up the street as if on a wager.

Alexander hesitated for a moment and then decided to let him go. He turned to the unknown man, who was writhing on the sidewalk.

"Well, do you want more?" he demanded.

"Oh!" howled the victim, "let me go! I ain't done nothin'! Don't kill me! Let me go!"

It was not the voice of a man dangerously hurt, and Alexander came to the conclusion that he would live through several such experiences.

"Where are you shot?" he asked.

"Through the lungs!"

"Your voice is surprisingly strong for a man with such a hurt."

"I mean through the heart."

"I should say it was still beating."

"A bullet went through the brain of me."

"If it's as hard ter find as his brains, it won't do no good ter probe fer it," remarked Teddy.

"Oh, oh!" groaned the stranger. "I'm growing cold. The dampness of death is enter my forrud, an' my limbs is stiffen' already. I see pale an' pallid forms, an' all is dark."

Alexander unceremoniously jerked him up to a sitting position.

"See here!" he exclaimed, "you are not hurt at all. Stop your howling!"

"My stomach is on fire, an' my head goes round like a wheel."

"Be gentle wid him, Aleck," advised Teddy. "He has wheels in his head. Why, he looks as ef he had a whole trolley line."

"Who are you?" demanded the detective.

"My name is Cornelius Grogan, an' I'm a lost man."

"We'll put the name enter yer monument," promised Teddy.

"Why did you molest us?" pursued Alexander, sharply.

"I was hired ter do it, boss; I didn't want ter, but Tommy Pool coaxed me in-ter it."

"Who is Tommy Pool?"

"He lives around here an' sleeps in boxes. So do I, but I'm a gentleman, an' he's a tough, an' when that smooth-talkin' feller come around they led me astray."

Mr. Grogan meditated on his last word, and then almost burst into violent sobs.

"They led me astray!" he repeated.

"I didn't want ter do it, but Tommy Pool made me. The slick feller had hired him. Oh! don't blame me; they led me astray!"

Cornelius liked the word very much,

but he made no impression on his companions. He looked as if he had been astray all his life, and reasonably sure of keeping it up.

The detective was tiring of the bother the fellow was making, and he made a fresh attempt to bring him to terms, and it was made with emphasis which finally appealed to Grogan in one way if not in another. He grew scared, and then the rest was easy.

"They hired me," he whimpered. "I'm no good, an' I sleep in boxes like Tommy Pool, but Tommy is lucky, he is; an' he gits jobs, an' I don't. But ter-night they hired me, too, an' Kidder Schmidt; an' we was ter do ye up. They knew you was inter that house, but didn't know which way you'd go out, so the boss an' me took one side, an' Tommy an' Kidder the other. It was we who found ye, but I'm sorry of it, fer that bullet o' yours went clean through me t'roat. Me larynx is shot all inter bits."

Alexander had more to ask, but he made but little headway. Grogan persisted that he did not know the leading man, nor why the assault had been made, and, at last, he was to be believed.

He seemed to be no more than a tramp who was ready to do lawless work if paid for it.

Much to the disgust of Teddy Tiernan, the detective decided to let the fellow go, so, keeping him until they were near the elevated road, he was set adrift.

He drifted toward the docks with considerable speed.

"A mighty poor thing ter do!" grumbled Teddy.

"Never mind. We shall see him again."

"Be you goin' ter seek that miserable tramp—"

"No. He will seek us. Hugh Davidson has shown his hand!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSEHOLD.

Alexander went home and went to bed. Exciting as the recent events had been he was not kept awake by them. Worn out, he slept long and deeply, and it was late in the morning when he woke. When slumber departed he lost no time in getting in motion. He dressed and was ready for the work of another day.

Theodore was anxious to talk and be comforted, but he found the detective a dull companion that morning.

The elder brother did not see fit to tell him, as yet, what had come to light in regard to their unfortunate parent's past, but he could not keep his own thoughts from the subject. He had much to think of then, but it was done with calm and logical directness.

After breakfast he left the house and proceeded to Elias Warrington's residence.

From the first he had felt that he would have to bring somebody there up with a short turn. He had not forgotten his early impression that every one within its walls was concealing something from him, and he did not intend to let them hug their secrets much longer.

When he rang the bell it was old George Gray who answered. The last few hours had not dealt kindly with George. He had always looked his advanced age, but now he more than looked it. He seemed to have aged all of five years in thirty-six hours. He looked weak, haggard, sick and miserable.

Alexander greeted him cheerfully.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gray. I trust everything is all right?"

"Yes, sir," responded George, faintly. "All is well with us now."

"It must be a great relief to have it all off your mind."

"It is, sir; it is," muttered the old servant, looking at the floor steadfastly.

"Nothing to trouble you, now the body has been removed, eh?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You show the effects of having a mind perfectly at ease, Mr. Gray. I can well understand your sense of relief. You really look cheerful once more."

The detective was playing with George, but the latter was not a fool. He knew there was sarcasm behind the words, and

if he did not suspect deep designs, he did feel that his appearance did not call for such assurances.

"I am no longer young, sir," he responded, with dignity. "If I am worried it ought not to be made the subject of jests."

"Mr. Gray," Alexander quickly exclaimed, "I never was further from wishing to jest than now. If, however, I see what is spread out so plainly before my eyes, I am not to blame for being gifted with the power of sight and observation; nor can you object as long as you withhold your full confidence. When you get ready to be frank you will find me your friend."

With this he ignored the old man and passed on up the stairs. There was profound silence behind him until he was nearly up to the floor above, and then George's voice rose feebly:

"Maurice Everton is here to see his aunt."

The detective thought he now understood something that had just been presented to his notice. Somewhere ahead of him he heard the voices of a man and a woman in heated argument or controversy. He had been wondering as to the cause of it, and George had presented a solution of the riddle.

Alexander paused with his foremost foot on the floor and the other on the upper stair. Just then the door at the side of the hall opened and a man emerged hastily. The new-comer recognized Maurice Everton.

"I hope you will come to your senses in time!" exclaimed Maurice.

Clearly, he shot the remark at somebody within the room. He banged the door to after him, and then made for the head of the stairs in some haste. There was but little light, and he was quite close to Alexander before he saw that anybody was there. Then he stopped short.

"Good-morning, Mr. Everton," spoke the detective.

"Oh? Oh! is it you, Leland?"

"Yes."

"I did not see you in the darkness."

"It is duskish here. Were you going away?"

"Yes."

"I see you still take an interest in the Oliver case."

"To perdition with it!" Maurice exclaimed.

"Has your interest waned?"

"I am not a man-catcher, and, as the criminal in this case is under lock and key, I have no time to bother with it."

"You still believe Rattlefoot guilty?"

Everton was not quick with his answer, and there was enough light for Alexander to notice that his face was a study. He seemed uncertain and ill at ease, but he finally responded:

"I am not an expert, and I leave the trial of the case to you, a jury and a judge. Still, I see no reason to change my first expression of opinion. I may be wrong, however."

Alexander understood the answer fully. Whatever might be the actual reason for Maurice's belief, he did not care to be too pronounced in opposing Mrs. Persis Gordon's opinion.

"We may all be wrong," mildly remarked the detective. "Until Rattlefoot is brought in guilty we are, in one sense, bound to regard him as innocent. That does not prevent our holding opinions, since they cannot injure him. Are you going now, Mr. Everton?"

"Yes."

"I will see you to the door."

They went down slowly.

"I presume," added the detective, "that you have seen the report in the morning papers that Miss Aola Oliver has been to police headquarters and recognized Rattlefoot as one Charles Davidson?"

"I have."

"Did you ever hear of Davidson before?"

"Sir, my acquaintance is not with burglars or murderers."

"That I can readily believe. Then you never heard of him?"

"Why should I? I see no reason to suspect that he figured in Mr. Oliver's past

—I do not know the full facts—and, furthermore, I did not know Oliver except casually. No, I never met Charles Davidson until the fatal night."

"I merely asked casually."

Alexander made the remark blandly, and his face told no tales. He had, however, lost nothing. He had asked if Maurice ever had heard of Davidson, and the young man, after several irrelevant observations, had endeavored to escape with the statement that he never had met Davidson—something very different from what had been asked of him.

He seemed relieved when his companion let it go at that, and, as Alexander did not press him to remain, he took his departure from the house. With quick steps he went off down the street.

Leland made one of his general surveys of the premises. He did not care to be too pertinacious. He saw Mrs. Gordon and James Black. Persis evidently bore him ill-will on account of the poor satisfaction she had received on her visit to the detective, and she was curt and uncommunicative—all of which did not seem to worry Alexander in the least.

James Black he found more interesting. James had the haggard face which had grown to be universal at Warrington's house—or common to all but Elias himself—and James impressed the observer a good deal.

Having given due thought to the report that Rattlefoot had been freely admitted to the house by somebody, the officer had marked Persis and James down as the only ones worthy of suspicion.

James surely carried a secret, and he was carrying it with the air of a wolf skulking through the underbrush and in fear of the gun of the sportsman.

"I am afraid to trust this man Black," mused Alexander, as he walked away from the house, anon. "I have decided to look into Persis Gordon's private life at once. I must do the same with James. I do not like his manner—he might take a notion to run away."

Memory of James Black persisted in hovering in Alexander's mind, but he did not let it interfere with his business. He had set out to go to the vicinity where Maurice Everton lived and see if he could learn more of the family. As he had taken Maurice's address early in the affair, he had no trouble in finding the house.

Pausing near at hand he looked upward at the respectable appearing building.

"So Maurice lives here?" he mused.

"Who else? Has he near relatives? Has Persis visited this house, as he has her home at Warrington's? Of whom can I inquire?"

"Thinking of making a raid?"

The question was asked close to the detective's elbow, and he turned quickly and saw a policeman. The man was smiling, and Alexander quickly recognized an acquaintance.

"Is this your beat, Traynor?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know everybody around here?"

"Can't say I do. You see, when the last shake-up came I was transferred. That was only two months ago, and I don't know them all in this section."

"Know yonder house, and it's people?"

"Somewhat. The name is Everton. Quiet, peaceable family—an invalid lady, a maiden cousin of hers, and her son, Maurice."

"Respectable people, eh?"

"Yes. If you want to find anything crooked it's no good to look there."

CHAPTER XXI.

A MAN IN FLIGHT.

The policeman's information did not discourage or surprise Alexander Leland. He never had imagined it was otherwise.

"The invalid lady, I take it, is Maurice Everton's mother," he pursued. "Who is the maiden cousin?"

"A Miss Doreas Blythe," replied the patrolman.

"Do they ever have visitors?"

"Now you get too deep for me. I never noticed. But, say, my roundsman, Griffin,

lived next door to them. Suppose you see him. He will soon be along."

It was just the chance Leland desired, and he waited patiently until the roundsman came. He knew that officer personally, too, and it was easy to open the tide of information.

"I've known them all from my childhood," declared Griffin. "Why, I used to go to school with Mrs. Everton and her sister, Persis, now Mrs. Gordon. I've known them from the start."

"What do you know of them?"

"Plain, respectable people. No bad blood in that family. Even young Maurice, exposed to temptations as young men are nowadays, has resisted all allurements of vice. He's a fine fellow."

"Matter-of-fact crowd, eh?"

"Yes."

"No mystery, and no romance?"

"Not a bit—unless it is Persis Gordon," added the roundsman, slowly, his expression changing.

"What of her?"

"Nothing to her hurt, I guess. She may not be so wise as she might—men and women sometimes are not, you know—and she is human."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose this bears on the Captain Oliver murder?"

"Yes."

"I know of absolutely nothing that will connect Persis, or injure her. The matter I had reference to is wholly foreign to that affair. Since you have drawn a part of it out of me you shall have the whole, so you can see that it is nothing."

"Oblige me in that way."

"Well, Persis has been married, but has lived a widow for ten years. She is now nearing forty, and, though her delicate organization and willowy form serve to help her hide her age in some ways, she looks her years fully in other respects."

"Now, she is not generally understood. People in general regard her as an ordinary woman who conducts Elias Warrington's household affairs with as much machinery of feeling as of action. I know her better; she is of a romantic nature, and wouldn't refuse an offer to marry, if she liked the man who presented himself."

"That streak in her nature has led her to the point of which I am now to speak."

"Observe the house three doors from Mrs. Everton's. It is a boarding-house kept by one Mrs. Greene, a friend of Persis Gordon. To this house Persis has gone as a visitor ever since Mrs. Greene hired it, some years ago."

"A few weeks back there came to the boarding-house a man who called himself Morris Avingleigh. Persis met him there, and he seemed to be struck with her. He hovered around her when she came to visit there, and, somehow, she got to coming oftener than she ever did before. It got to be common remark that Morris was very attentive to Mrs. Gordon—and she to him."

"Yet she was a good ten years older than he looked."

"From the first, Mrs. Everton and Maurice objected to Morris, and to the interest Persis manifested in him. They saw the disparity of years, and they did not like Morris."

For the first time, Alexander interrupted.

"Describe this Morris," he requested.

"He was hovering around thirty years of age, was tall and finely formed, had an alert, worldly way, and a dashing manner, and might have been called good-looking in some circles. I've seen him. Frankly, he looked to me like a man of doubtful life—maybe only a gambler, or possibly worse—and that's what the Evertons thought of him."

"They objected, did they?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"With the usual result?"

"Yes. Persis kept on seeing him, and liking him."

"Opposition always does that."

"She was not angry with them. She has some temper, but she's a good-hearted woman, and attached to her kindred. She grieved, argued with them, was very sorry, but kept on seeing Morris. More than

that I can't tell you. You'll have to wait until time adds more."

"The present situation is as you have described, eh?"

"As far as I know, yes."

"And Morris remains at the boarding-house?"

"I suppose so."

"Can you make an excuse to call on him?"

"I might."

"Let us go."

They went. With Alexander it was a mere farce, for he was sure he could foresee the result. However, they went and inquired for Mr. Morris Avingleigh. The answer was as the detective anticipated.

"He is not in. He has not been here since Thursday afternoon, nor have we received any word from him. We are beginning to fear that something may have happened to him."

Alexander said they would not wait for him, so they went away.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the roundsman.

"Perfectly."

"Your business is your own, and I don't care to try and worm anything from you, of course. Still, I can see that you have some bone to pick with Morris. I don't care if you have—I don't like the cut of his jib; while as for poor Persis, she would be better off if Morris was in prison. She is infatuated with him, and no good can come of it. He must have some unusual motive in paying such close attention to her—he is not the man to fall in love with a woman a good ten years his senior."

Alexander allowed the roundsman to form his own opinion, and after some further conversation, took his departure.

"I believe," ran the current of his thoughts, "that we now have an explanation of Persis Gordon's remarkable conduct. Although she is much older than Charles Davidson, she seems to have become infatuated with him. Probably he planned it all from a dishonorable motive, be the motive what it may—and succeeded in getting this hold on her. Doubtless her relatives have disapproved of it wholly, and this will explain why she now thinks Rattlefoot innocent, while Maurice Everton is just as sure he is guilty. Each has an interested motive for arriving at an estimate of Rattlefoot. Now, did Persis admit him that fatal night?"

The detective walked on in deep thought. Finally he shook his head slowly and gravely.

"Perhaps, but I doubt it!" he decided.

Presently he aroused from his meditations and became keenly alert. His course was toward Elias Warrington's house, and he had a definite purpose in going there.

He was still several blocks away when he chanced to observe somebody, who, having once caught his attention, held it firmly.

"James Black!" he murmured.

It was the Warrington servant, and, always mysterious, he became more mysterious now. He was skulking along as if trying to avoid notice, and, just then, he saw a patrolman and slunk into a doorway with an appearance of alarm.

"He needs watching!" mused Alexander.

The patrolman passed, and then James came out of his hiding place. He looked around like a hunted man, and directly began to hurry away in the direction he had previously been going.

The suspicion had been strong in Alexander's mind that James needed to be under observation, and he found him more than ever worthy of such notice. He quietly fell in behind James and followed where he led. It was no short journey. The servant went as far as Broadway, and then moved along that thoroughfare.

When he paused it was to enter a business office, and Alexander's eyes glimmered a little more than usual when he saw that it was the sub-quarters of a big railroad.

The detective went closer and stood by the open door. He was thus placed so that he could overhear the talk within, and he speedily found it interesting.

James was bargaining for a ticket over the line, and to Chicago.

He had mastered his nervousness in part, but he little suspected the storm that was gathering. His questions were of importance in the detective's estimation.

"He wants a train to start as quick as he can reach the depot," thought Alexander, summing up. "More, he wants it to make phenomenal time between here and Chicago. Is he interested in seeing all existing records broken, or what is his haste? On the whole, I imagine it will not be wise for him to leave New York to-day."

James did not think so. He found the arrangement of trains very nearly to his liking, so he took a ticket and paid for it. He breathed a sigh of relief, and then turned and made for the door again.

He stepped out, and just then a hand touched him on the shoulder.

"A word with you, please, James!" spoke a mild voice.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BAD TURN FOR JAMES.

James had started violently when the hand touched his shoulder. He now wheeled suddenly. He found himself facing Alexander Leland. The detective looked as mild as his speech had been, but, when James recognized him, his color faded away curiously. Alexander opened the conversation in the most friendly manner possible.

"How much is the fare to Chicago now, Mr. Black?" he inquired.

James's lips moved with several convulsive efforts before he managed to falter:

"I—I don't know, sir."

"How is that?"

"I don't know how," feebly replied James.

"How what?" continued Alexander, enjoying his incoherency and not unwilling to add to it.

"How—how anything—how nothing!"

It was a remarkable response, and so wide of common sense that its very incoherence stirred James to a measure of sanity.

"I don't know what you are talking about, sir," he added, stiffly.

"The subject is this ticket!" and Alexander touched the long slip of printed paper that James had forgotten to put away. "When do you start for Chicago?"

"I am not going there, sir."

"Then what do you want of this ticket? Think of having it framed, and keep it to look at?"

"It—it is for another gentleman," James managed to assert, but his manner was as weak at his voice.

"Where is this gentleman?"

"Down at the Astor House."

The detective took out his watch.

"He has just thirty minutes to catch his train. Do you think you can go downtown, and then get him to the station in time?"

"He is not going until to-morrow."

"But you said it was yourself who was going, and that you wanted the train I have mentioned."

"Oh, oh! who told you that?" asked James, reproachfully. "You are very much misinformed—very much, sir."

"Nonsense, James! I was listening all the while you were bargaining for that ticket. Why do you lie about this thing? What do you want to go to Chicago for? What is your motive in wishing to flee from New York?"

Alexander's voice had suddenly grown sharp and stern, and it made James shake perceptibly. His face was ghastly, and the emotion that moved him so was terror, pure and simple.

He stood gazing blankly at the detective, unable to speak further.

"Can it be," pursued Alexander, "that you fear to remain in the city? Does Capt. Richard Oliver's ghost haunt you?"

"Oh, oh!"

It was a nondescript sort of a cry, with terror the most noticeable thread in its warp and woof, but the detective added, mercilessly:

"Why hadn't you dare remain and see Oliver's death investigated?"

"I am not frightened, sir. I don't know anything about it. I am not going away."

I don't fear to see the matter settled, sir. I—I—I am not scared!"

James tried so hard to put on a bold front that he threw his head back to a ludicrous pitch, and it would all have been very amusing if serious matters had not been the basis of everything.

The detective was done with playing with James. He quickly retorted:

"You were going to run away. I suspected it and followed you here on purpose to battle you. I saw you enter yonder office; I heard you bargain for a ticket to take you to Chicago."

"It was for another man—"

"You speak falsely, sir! You inquired as to the time of the next train, and expressed a desire to catch it as soon as possible yourself. Drop this veil of falsehood and let us come to business. You were going to run away from New York. Why?"

"I can't explain—"

"I can. It was all about that affair of Captain Dick Oliver's. Now, why are you so scared? Why have you been in a panic ever since the murder was done? Why need you fear the result of the investigation, unless you had a hand in the murder?"

"I?" gasped James, getting paler than ever, if that was possible. "Oh, sir, I am innocent—"

"Why did you let Rattlefoot into the house, that night?"

The servant's eyes looked liable to pop out of his head.

"Wha—wha—what?" he quavered.

"Why did you let him in?"

"I didn't. Really, Mr. Leland—"

"No more falsehoods, sir! You let him in. He rapped on the basement window, and you opened the door. He had the drunken man in tow. You admitted both. You did this at night, stealthily, unlawfully, treacherously, and well knowing the jeopardy into which you put the inmates of the house. Treacherous knave! And do you now ask me to believe you guiltless? Perhaps you can convince them at the Central office. Come to Mulberry Street!"

"Mercy, mercy!" gasped James.

"Then tell all you know."

"I know nothing, sir."

"I see you want to go to police headquarters."

"I am in your power. You represent the law, and I am only a single man. If you see fit to carry this thing on I can't help myself. All I can say is that I am innocent."

"Do you call it innocence to admit Rattlefoot at dead of night to a sleeping household?"

"I didn't do it; I admitted nobody."

James was still frightened remarkably, but he was so firm, without visible stubbornness, that Alexander was staggered. He began to wonder if he had tackled the wrong man in seeking the person who had admitted Rattlefoot. Then he remembered the purchase of the ticket.

"Why were you going to Chicago?"

"I told you the truth about it."

"You said it was for a man stopping at the Astor House. Very well; I will go to that hotel with you and see him. Come!"

Alexander took a forward step. He was ready, but James was not. The servant stood looking down at his feet.

"Come!" the detective repeated.

"Well, since you will have it, that part of my story was not true," James confessed. "The ticket was for myself. I was going to skip the town. I was going to do it mighty quick, too!"

"Why?"

James had mustered an air of manly decision, but it faded quickly before the last question. He studied his reply before making it, and the rapid changes of his expression told that he was at fault. He did not know what to answer. Suddenly he brightened up a little.

"I am dead tired of it there at Warrington's. Since the murder everything is at sixes and sevens, and it's a regular morgue. Persis Gordon and old George Gray go around as if they were at a funeral, and—" here James tried to be

humorous—"afraid of waking up the corpse by stepping on his grave-clothes, while their faces would freeze water. Ugh! They give me the shivers. I wanted to go away from such a funeral party. You see—"

James had the floor, and he was so impressed with the belief that there could be no great harm come to him while it was he who was doing the talking, that he would have gone on indefinitely. But Alexander broke in:

"Have you given your notice to Mr. Warrington?"

"No-o, sir."

"And you were running away like a scared wolf. Suspicious! Mr. Black, if you are tired of Warrington's I will aid you to leave there, but you need not go to Chicago. I am sure you can be accommodated at a nice private resort known to me."

James looked suddenly suspicious.

"Where is it?"

"Mulberry Street!"

"You mean that—that you arrest me?" tremulously asked the would-be runaway.

"You will be accommodated at police headquarters until you see fit to open your stubborn mouth. It will pay you well to do that thing speedily. The threads of the case designed to develop the murder mystery of Warrington's house are being slowly woven into shape. Beware lest you get caught in the web!"

"But—but—"

"Thus far I have no reason to believe that you had an actual hand in the slaying of Captain Dick Oliver. If you are innocent of that, you will do well to speak. I do know you are hiding something—I do know you can tell more of Rattlefoot than you have admitted. James, I advise you to speak in time to save your own scalp. We will go to Mulberry Street now."

Alexander laid hold of the servant's arm.

James was in a state of collapse, and he rather surprised the detective by following without a word. The truth was, James was too much frightened even to assert again that he was innocent.

They made the journey to police headquarters almost in total silence. It is not to be thought that James was without ideas, so the only theory was that he saw no way to benefit himself by speaking.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STAINED BIT OF CLOTH.

It was nearing night when Alexander reached home. Dark shadows hovered in the streets, and the lamps, already lighted, gave out the gloomy glow common to them before the full departure of day.

The detective mounted the stairs and went directly to his room. He had expected to have Theodore greet him as usual, but at first sight the younger brother was not to be seen. Before Alexander could give much thought to this fact the former emerged from the closet.

One look the detective took at him, and then quickly came the inquiry:

"What is wrong?"

"How do you know anything is?" asked Theodore.

"Your whole appearance tells it."

"I am ready to believe you. More, there is something wrong."

"What?"

"This house is watched."

"Are you still laboring under this delusion?"

"It is no delusion. I told you before that the premises were being spied upon. I reiterate it now. There has been a spy outside; the house is under watch!"

Theodore spoke with an emphasis that compelled Alexander to give him credit for sincerity, and the elder brother looked worried.

"What have you seen?"

"Men outside who never lose sight of the front door and windows. I know not what explanation you give to it, but I say they are watching for me."

"I find it hard to believe this."

"I knew you would. You are not keyed up to the pitch I am, and you use logic

where I use my eyes. I have seen what I assert. Spies have the house under observation. What does it mean? What should it mean, unless that they know I am here?"

"If they did that, and they wanted you, they would come and take you at once."

"Logic again. Logic sometimes trips and stumbles. I have seen the men—that is the stubborn fact."

Alexander walked to the window.

At first he was unable to see the least sign of trouble, or of any man whatever, but while he looked a stoutly-built person walked slowly down the block, his head bent as if in deep thought, and his manner as mild and inoffensive as was to be imagined.

"That's the man!" exclaimed Theodore, retreating from the window.

"Why, he looks more like a merchant out for a stroll than anything else. He has none of the signs of a detective or spy."

"He has patrolled the block for two days, and when he goes off the post he is succeeded by somebody else. A merchant, forsooth! He is hunting a man, not money."

This persistence made Alexander waver, and he eyed the stranger more keenly. The latter's head was not raised as he passed the house, but he surely did send a quick, furtive glance upward toward the second story, and Alexander could not help believing the glance was for the windows of their room.

The unknown passed on, his gaze still bent on the sidewalk, his manner still absent and mild.

"Do you really mean to say," asked Alexander, "that this same man has been patrolling the block for two days?"

"Yes."

"Does he ever seem to look at other houses?"

"Never! And he never fails to look at this one."

"It is singular."

"More, it tells a plain tale. This house is spied upon. Why? Are you under watch? No, for he does not go away when you do. Is there another criminal within these walls? You should know, but I do not think it. Summed up, he is after me!"

Theodore bent an anxious gaze upon his elder brother. He looked upon him as the personification of shrewdness, and almost expected an immediate analysis of the motives of the unknown, sure and complete. Further than this, he was frightened, and he saw no safety but in Alexander's wisdom and cunning.

"It is mysterious—or nothing!" admitted the detective. "If it is more than chance that he walks thus I don't see the explanation. A detective ought to be more crafty than to attract attention as he has done. Besides, who should put him on watch? Yes, and why doesn't he strike, if he has his game cornered?"

Theodore shook his head.

"I don't feel satisfied with your theory, brother. Anyhow, I cannot believe him a detective."

"Be that as it may, he is watching me!" declared Theodore, with additional emphasis.

Alexander stood thoughtfully by the window until the stranger returned on his mysterious tramp. Then the previous scene was re-enacted; the unknown passed gravely by, but did not fail to send the upward glance toward their windows.

"Do you doubt me?" inquired Theodore.

"I must confess that there is something to all this. The man would not walk two days merely for exercise. He has a motive, and it is one as singular as it is ominous, just now, in our sight. But how does he know you are here?—if it is you he is interested in."

"I pretend to know nothing but what I can see."

There was a knock at the door, and Alexander proceeded to answer. He found the colored man there who waited on the dining room table. This person immediately spoke in a subdued voice.

"Kin I speak wif you, Mr. Leland?"

"Certainly."

"Inside?"

"If you wish."

The waiter did wish it, and he entered and closed the door after him with considerable caution.

"You will please speak in an attenuated tone of manner," he requested, rolling his eyes at Alexander and Theodore alternately. "It is a private caucus. I have somethin' to promulgate."

"Go on, Jethro," the detective directed.

"You know that Miss 'Lizbuth, the chambermaid lady. Well, it's about her. It may be all right, but she has been snoopin' in here."

"How is that?"

"She's got somethin' from here, and she sets store by it. She don't understand that detective statesmen like you have a good many things that ordinary citizens don't carry in stock, ter use a mercantile technilocality."

"Come to the point, Jethro!"

"Well, she's been in here and cleaned up the room. That was late yesterday, and she requested your colleague here," Jethro waved his hand toward Theodore, "to retire to the parlor while she was about it. He had better have kept his optical eyes onto her."

"Well, what then?"

"She came out with a queer thing. I was a piece of white cotton cloth such a shirts are made of—muslin, she calls it—and it was funny-looking. In some places it was sco'tched by fire, and in some places it had queer stains onto it where it wasn't sco'tched. She had fished it out of yender stove!"

Jethro pointed to illustrate, but there was no need of it. He had struck a note of alarm, and the brothers needed no pointing.

They remembered that when the bloody portion of Theodore's sleeve had been thrown into the stove and set on fire they had been interrupted before they had seen it fully consumed.

It flashed upon them that it had not been thus consumed in full, and that the chambermaid had found what remained.

"What was she doing with the stove?" sharply demanded Alexander.

"Jest what I would like to know, though she did say she was fixing it all ready so a fire could be started when the weather got cold enough. Miss 'Lizbuth is always getting too unsavory!"

"She had no business to meddle with this stove!" declared Alexander, warmly.

"Most assuredly not, sah."

"What did she do with this remnant?"

"Gave it to somebody that she knew—I guess she knew him; anyhow, it was a man who came to the doah, and she gave it as I have intimated befoah, sah."

The detective cast a swift, sidelong glance at Theodore. He saw that his brother was very pale, and it was plain that he realized the serious nature of the news.

"Why in the world did she do that?"

"I don't know."

"What was the man like?"

"Well, sah; he was a big man wif a commanding air about him. I only just had a glance at him, and saw her give him something. After he had gone away I asked her what it was—she didn't know I had seen the epersward, sah."

"What did she say?"

"Denied point blank that she had given away anything, and said the man had wanted a bite to eat. Bosh! He sported better clothes than you or me—begging your pardon, sah. And, then, Miss 'Lizbuth was so frustrated over my asseverations that she looked like an Aurora Borer Elastic in the sky. She kept on denying of it when I persisted in accusing her, but she falsified superlatively."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. For when, just after that, I happened to think of the piece of shirt-sleeve she had rolled up in a paper, and suspected the truth, an' went to look for it, I couldn't find it."

"So you think she gave that to the unknown man?"

"I know she did, sah."

"Thank you for telling us."

"I thought you would want to know about it. Of course, I don't know that you valued the fragment, sah; but I do hate to see a woman get too unsavory."

The waiter had been backing toward the door, and he now made a bow and went out wholly.

The brothers surveyed each other with consternation depicted on their faces.

"This is strange!" murmured Alexander, presently.

"What I have told you? Do you now refuse to believe the enemy are on my track?"

"But this—this— How should they know of you?"

"Judge for yourself. You can see that not only have they struck the trail and have me under watch, but they have bribed the chambermaid. All is plain. Somebody—and it must be an officer—suspects that I killed Captain Oliver, and the pursuit is hot. They have the piece of blood-stained cloth, and—Great heavens!"

Theodore broke off with a great start as a knock sounded at the door, but immediately it was opened by the colored waiter, who announced:

"A gentleman to see you, sah. He gave the name of Hugh Davidson!"

CHAPTER XXIV. A KNIFE APPEARS.

"It has come!"

This was the thought that flashed through Alexander's mind. He had no sooner heard the name of Hugh Davidson than he connected the visit with the mysterious watcher of the house, and the equally mysterious man to whom the chambermaid had given the fragment of cloth.

He was to be excused if he yielded for a moment to dismay. It was not for himself; it was for Theodore he worried. Brought to bay, as they seemed to be, he felt capable of fighting the battle out.

There was a moment of silence, and it was one of weakness. Then the iron in Alexander's nature reasserted itself. With a tremendous effort he forced himself to crush down the man and elevate the detective. It was a time for cool and official action.

"Show the gentleman up!"

Steady as a rock was his direction, and the waiter, bowing, departed without a suspicion that Leland's heart was beating rapidly under the firm exterior.

Theodore was in a panic.

"Why do you have that man here?" he cried. "You heard the name—Hugh Davidson. And you must have seen in the newspapers that Miss Aola Oliver has been to police headquarters and recognized Rattlefoot as one Charles Davidson. Of course you have; we have referred to it. This man is a Davidson—he must be a relative. Why do you have him here? He has come to seize me, betray me, arrest me!"

Rapidly, excitedly, tremulously spoke Theodore, but Alexander surveyed him with a face that was full only of calmness, kindness and deliberate pity. He had been called the Double-Quick Detective in the past, but the painful dilemmas of the last few days, coupled with the latent iron of his nature, had made him a model of self-control and patience.

"This is the best way, Theodore," he mildly replied. "I cannot believe that Hugh Davidson has any knowledge of you—he, at least, is not a detective. In any case, we may as well face the danger. Be brave. I will master this danger. To the closet; his steps sound outside!"

Theodore dared not stay to argue. He made a headlong dive, and gained the cover of the closet just in time to avoid discovery.

Davidson entered.

With an outward appearance of perfect calmness, Alexander faced him. This man—this flashy fellow in the clothes of miserable taste, and with the obnoxious upward turn of mustache—this offshoot of bar-room life and the lowest grade of sport—this man had tried to kill him in the gloomy stretches of South Street, but there

was no sign of personal feeling as Alexander looked at him.

There was just a shade of inquiry in Davidson's aspect, as if he were asking himself if he would be recognized, but he seemed to have his answer in the perfect calmness of the detective.

The visitor bowed.

"Mr. Leland?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir; that is my name."

"Mine is Davidson—Hugh Davidson. Maybe you have heard the surname before. Unfortunate events have made it much talked of, just now, in New York."

"I remember the name, sir."

"I am a brother of Charles Davidson."

"I thought it probable when I heard you announced by the servant."

"Doubtless you can also guess that I have come on account of my brother."

"Pray proceed, Mr. Davidson."

"Charles is innocent, sir!" exclaimed Charles's brother.

"Have you secured proof of that assertion?"

"Why, man, he ain't the one to do such a deed. I've known him all my life, and I ought to know. He has a heart as kind and mild as that of a woman. I have always associated with him intimately, and I should know if there was a loose screw in his moral make-up. There is none. Charles is as free from wishing to do injury to his fellow-beings as I am."

Alexander bowed serenely. He did not forget that his present companion had tried to slay him on South Street.

"It is a good deal to an accused person to have his friends stand by him."

"I'll stand by Charles—yes, sir; to the end. Why, he is my brother. Did you ever have a brother?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't you stand by him in difficulty?"

"Very likely I should."

"Was your brother brave, loyal, temperate and affectionate?"

"Your description cannot be improved upon."

"Then you can guess how I feel about Charles. Just imagine, sir, how it would be if things were reversed. Suppose your brother was mixed up with this murder affair! Suppose there were some who believed him guilty of having killed Captain Richard Oliver! Suppose he was menaced by the law! What would you think then?"

"I can easily understand that it is painful for you to see your kinsman accused."

Davidson leaped to his feet nervously.

"I tell you he is innocent. Come, Mr. Leland, you are much in this case. Have you found any evidence against Charles except the unfortunate fact that he was in Warrington's house?"

"That is more than I am at liberty to tell," replied Alexander, shaking his head.

"Your silence is enough. I know you have no more; there is no more to tell. As for his old trouble with Captain Oliver, over the latter's daughter, that is all nonsense. There was a little fuss, but Charles always laughed at it. Mere nonsense!"

"Yes?"

"Nothing else. But I am here to do more than talk. Richard Oliver was killed by the man in gray. I can prove that. I am on the track of the man in gray. I am here to catch him!"

It was a startling announcement, and Alexander found it harder than ever to keep a brave exterior. Theodore, crouching in the closet, gave up all hope.

"This is the man who has been spying," he thought. "He has found me! I shall be dragged to prison—and I shall mix Alexander up with my ruin!"

If Theodore had shown weaknesses in the past he was making amends by always thinking of Alexander now more than of himself. There was good in his nature, and the Double-Quick Detective was justified in keeping up the fight for him.

With a stronger effort than ever, Alexander made answer:

"Where is your man?"

"First, let me give you some evidence."

Davidson thrust a hand into his pocket. It came out holding a long, narrow parcel. He unrolled a paper deftly and exposed a keen and glittering knife.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Do you see this thing?"

"A knife!" calmly replied the detective.

"Look closer! Did you ever see one like it? Remember the weapon that took Captain Dick Oliver's life. Remember that it was bright, keen and new. Is this like it?"

Alexander had the knife in his hand.

"There is a decided resemblance," he admitted.

"There ought to be. Both came from the same lot. Both came from the same store. More, the man of whom this was bought also sold the knife that killed Oliver."

The detective could not help being strongly interested.

"To whom did he sell the other?" he inquired.

"To the man in gray, with the reddish-hued stone in his vest front. He bought it! He killed Oliver! The truth is now known!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAN IN GRAY IS ACCUSED.

Rattlefoot's brother had grown very much excited. He had poured out his words with vehement swiftness, and, too much excited to control himself, he caught up the knife and swung it in mid-air.

"The man in gray did the murder!" he added, loudly.

Alexander Leland kept his seat and looked as calm as if he was not in the least interested.

"Where is the proof?" he inquired, steadily.

"The dealer of whom this was bought will identify the other knife and the person who purchased it. He describes the man in gray exactly. He swears he can identify him when found. He swears it was not bought by any one resembling my brother. Don't you see how it is?"

Davidson suddenly broke off in his excited speech. He had chanced to look at the detective more attentively, and the latter's placid expression aroused his resentment.

"I certainly hear what you say," responded the detective.

"Is that all? You are like ice. Have you no fellow-feeling? Are you a stone? Can't you feel for a man whose brother is in peril of his life?"

"I think I may say I can."

"You speak it like a machine. Is your heart a rock? Remember, your own brother! What if he was in danger? What if the law was reaching out for him?"

"Believe me, Mr. Davidson," evenly remarked Alexander, "I am not deaf to your arguments, nor without feeling. To be calm is my trade, I may say. Now, as to this knife. Did you buy it?"

"No."

"Who did?"

Davidson hesitated, but only for a moment.

"A lady," he responded. "She has all along doubted Charles's guilt; she has tried to prove it. Seeing that the knife was new she set out to find one like it. Pardon me if I do not divulge her identity now."

Alexander thought he did not need to hear any name, but he was surprised at results. He had asked a detective friend of his to take up this very line of work, and the man had hunted widely without finding a knife like that which killed Captain Dick Oliver.

One had been found by somebody else—Alexander easily saw the likeness, though nothing was yet proved as to where each came from before they left the dealer.

He did not care to argue with Davidson, or give away certain ideas that occurred to him. It would be singular if the dealer had sold only two knives; so he merely asked for the name and address of the merchant, and let that part of it rest.

"Is there more?" he inquired.

"The man in gray must be found," Hugh declared.

"Have you any clew to him?"

"Not yet."

"Maybe he is far from New York."

"I don't think so. This is the place to

hide; he will hide here. Watch for him! We know not when or where he will be found. Why, before you know it he may walk right into this room!"

"If that should happen we could set him down as a most accommodating sort of a fellow," returned Alexander, forcing a yawn.

"The unexpected often happens, and never oftener than when we think there is no chance for it. Sometimes when we think we have a thing down fine we really are wide of the mark."

"That may be the way with you now."

"I meant it to apply to you. Pardon me, if I say you have fixed all your attention on poor Charley, and ignored the fact that there is a suspicious man in the case. Have you ever given one thought to the man who went to Warrington's with Charley?"

"Yes."

"Keep it up! Think more! Act! Remember that he dresses in gray, is a blond, and wears a gold pin with a reddish-colored stone on the side of his vest. Give heed to this man! Get interested in him. Be more than passive. Remember that he is something to you!"

"I will remember."

"Mr. Leland, I beg of you to hunt for that man. Find him and you have the real slayer of Captain Oliver. My brother is innocent—I beg of you to believe that. Poor Charley never harmed Oliver."

Davidson was back on the part of the subject that stirred him the most, and he made an eloquent appeal for Rattlefoot. He also gave the Davidson family a good reputation in general, asserting that there never was one of them that had done, or would do, a mean or lawless act—all of which was very interesting to Alexander when he remembered how recently his visitor had tried to stab him in a cowardly way by the docks.

The interview progressed and was concluded without friction or any angry speech from either party. Davidson appeared to grow hopeful when he saw how moderate Alexander was in everything, and the caller's voice took on a more natural and hearty inflection toward the end.

Having gained the detective's promise that he would not forget the man in gray, and that he would give due attention to him, Davidson took his departure.

Theodore came out of his hiding-place. He looked worried and haggard.

"A close call," he exclaimed.

"Davidson was wholly unsuspecting of your presence."

"Was he, or was he not? I don't know what to think. He made some strange speeches. Was he ignorant or did he hit so near the truth by chance?"

"I believe it was no more than chance."

Alexander took up the knife, poised it in his hand, meditated for a moment, and then added:

"You heard the alleged history of this weapon. It is alleged to be of the same lot whence came the knife with which Captain Dick Oliver was killed. What do you know of it?"

"Nothing."

"Have you bought any knife?"

"If I have I know nothing about it," answered Theodore, promptly. "With my shameful history as a drunkard in mind I can say nothing positively as to what I have done when my brain was muddled. Certain it is that, when in my senses, I have bought no knife whatever."

The detective continued to look at the knife thoughtfully, and presently Theodore added:

"Don't you think this is all a device on Davidson's part?"

"I am unable to decide just what the facts are. If there is a move in the way of bogus evidence, the dealer in hardware is either in the plot or has been unduly influenced to believe that he really sold a knife as Davidson claims. That he is ready to assert that he sold such a thing to a blond man is sure, or Davidson would not have given me the address."

"Alexander, can I have bought that accursed thing found at Warrington's when I was under the influence of liquor?" asked Theodore, tremulously.

"I don't know."

"You look grave; you sigh. Do you mean that you believe it?"

"Let us hope that you did nothing of the sort. I am not going to declare that I believe you did not buy. The whole matter is so complicated by your failure to remember what did happen that night, that we can tell nothing surely."

It was not an encouraging reply, and Theodore turned abruptly and walked to the window. Through the lace curtains he saw something that alarmed him anew.

"The mysterious man is still patrolling the street!" he exclaimed.

Alexander rose hastily and joined his brother. He, too, saw the unknown marching gravely down the block.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered.

"He is surely after me! He pursues me remorselessly! He hangs to the scent like a bloodhound! He defers the climax that he may first worry me to insanity. He is a demon sent to haunt, to crush, to ruin me. He is surely on my trail!"

Theodore was growing greatly excited again, but the detective was like ice outwardly.

"There is something about the man that is worthy of more than passing thought," he admitted. "I am not sure he is shadowing you—"

"But you must confess that it looks like it."

"It does, assuredly. I have been thinking of this man of mystery. He makes me nervous, too. We must see him."

"See him?"

"At least, I must."

"Why?"

"To question him. To ask him what the deuce he means by haunting our locality—"

"It would be madness. Besides, he would not heed you—"

"Wouldn't he? Not if I intimate that I thought him a burglar who was waiting to make a haul?"

"Capital! I had not thought of that."

"The fellow will get off this block if I can make him!" added Alexander, with emphasis. "He will explain himself or go to jail!"

"Good, good!" cried Theodore, in delight.

"I intend to go now."

The detective rose and reached for his hat. He took another look at the street patrol, and thus consumed a full half-minute. This done, he moved toward the door. Theodore had stood inactive, his head bent and his expression very serious. Suddenly he darted forward. He held out his hand and his face moved nervously.

"Alexander," he spoke thickly, "it is very good of you to stand by me thus—to fight my battles, to struggle for a worthless wretch who would never have been in trouble but for his own sins. I appreciate it all, and I know I have the best brother in the world. God bless and keep you, Alexander!"

The speaker had almost broken down, and tears filled his eyes. The detective regarded him wonderingly.

"Why, my boy," he answered, "you mustn't get moved like this. I have done nothing. Fight for you? Of course I have, and I'd do it to the very end. You were my mother's son! Isn't that enough for an explanation? Come, come, no more—we understand each other—we're very good friends, brother. But let us get at this fellow who is trying to wear out the sidewalks of our fair city."

The detective felt that there ought not to be an interview too affecting, and, while he felt like reciprocating Theodore's mood in full, he compelled himself to be bluff of manner, and wound up with a nonsensical remark. This done, he opened the door, waved his hand to Theodore, and passed out.

"How intently he looked after me!" murmured Alexander. "Is he losing hope? It was as if he were bidding me farewell. But let me think only of the shadower."

He reached the street. The unknown patrol had just passed, and he hastened briskly after, determined to have the matter settled.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PERKINS, MYSTERIOUS AND STUBBORN.

Quick and energetic were the steps of the detective, and he gained rapidly on the unknown. The latter was walking with lowered head and thoughtful air, it seemed, and he did not heed the steps behind him. He had nearly reached the corner when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

He turned—not quickly, nor with a nervous start, but as coolly as if it was the most common thing in the world to be touched on the shoulder as one walked the streets of New York.

He saw Alexander—and Alexander saw him.

The unknown was impressive. He had a fine, muscular form, and his face matched. It was broad, resolute and intelligent. Alexander knew he had met a man of mental force and acumen.

"Can I have a word with you, sir?" he asked, quietly.

"Most certainly, sir," the unknown answered. "Are you a stranger in the city, sir?"

"On the contrary, I have a fair acquaintance with it," Alexander responded, meeting the grave interrogation quite as gravely as it had been made. "I make a practice of seeing what occurs around me. I have seen you. I live in one of yonder houses."

"A pleasant block, is it not?" mildly inquired the unknown.

"You seem to like it."

"So I do."

"I have noticed that, for several days, you have been walking up and down the street at all hours, and several hours each day. May I ask what you do it for?"

"For my health."

The two men preserved their striking calmness. They looked each other in the eyes, and they must have realized that it was the battle of a strong will against another of its kind.

"You do not look ill," reminded Alexander.

"I do not intend to get ill. Hence, the walk, as a preventive."

"Do you live near here?"

"Not especially."

"And your business?"

The unknown's evasion led Alexander to make his inquiry sharp and peremptory, but the stranger remained calm and mild.

"Dry goods. I am busy over ledgers and orders when not here—"

"I should be pleased to know the name of your firm, and where you live, sir."

For the first time the man exhibited traces of annoyance.

"Pardon me, sir, but I do not think I need to enter further into explanation. You are not known to me. I fail to see why you should be interested in my affairs."

"I can return the remark with reason, sir. I am curious to know why, when you pass No. 46, you always glance inquisitively at the windows of my room—why, in brief, your manner has the aspect of espionage, of the ways of a spy?"

"Spy, sir?"

"The ways of a spy, sir!"

The unknown was growing angry. Alexander remained like ice.

"You are impudent!" exclaimed the unknown.

"You know better than that," evenly asserted the detective. "It is not meddling if I become interested in a man who almost constantly paces back and forth in front of my home and eyes my particular window when he thus passes, nor is it impudence if I ask for an explanation, and, failing to get it, call him a spy. I am simply protesting against his acting like a spy."

"You put it strongly," muttered the stranger, less hotly.

"And fairly."

"Humph!"

"You have only to explain who and what you are—"

"I admit the right of no man to ask that of me."

"If you are a honorable man, why fear to explain?"

"Fear, sir? Fear? I do nothing of the sort. I simply decline to let you meddle with my business. That's all I have to say."

The speaker took a step away from Alexander.

"Do you refuse to satisfy me?" persisted the detective.

"Absolutely!"

"Think again."

"I won't think, and I decline to be worried by you further. I'll talk with you no more. I won't tell who I am. More, I shall walk this street all I wish. Understand?"

"Quite clearly. I like your way of being explicit. Now, allow me to reciprocate. Unless you make some satisfactory explanation I shall immediately take you to the police station as a suspicious character."

"What?"

"I am a detective. I shall arrest you and lodge complaint against you, alleging that your manner has been that of a burglar seeking to learn all about my house before making a lawless entrance."

Alexander was as much at his ease as ever, but his companion was aghast.

"You wouldn't dare to do that!" he gasped.

"I would—I shall!"

"But it would be infamous, sir!"

"It would put a stop to your skulking around my home, and it might bring out some elucidation of the mystery of your identity."

The unknown was speechless. He had played his game and failed, and it was clear that he did not like the turn of events. He looked at Alexander as if he regarded him as a sort of destroying demon, and did not know what spell to use to break the power he had brought down upon himself in hostility.

Time wore on without further speech; and the detective was getting sufficiently tired of it when his companion suddenly aroused.

"I don't know why I should dally with you," he observed. "You are meddlesome and impudent, but I have nothing to conceal. I am what I have said, a citizen who needs fear no man, and out for my usual exercise. If you are so anxious to learn where I live, you can learn by following me. I shall neither run nor cater to your inquisitiveness, more than your eyes will tell you. Now, I am going home."

He started off, and Leland allowed him to go. The unknown used his legs to good advantage, and the pace was brisk. Alexander kept by his side. Where he went the detective was a persistent and close attendant. Side by side they moved on, not a word passing between them.

Silent as the unknown was, he clearly felt that this system of shadowing was obnoxious. He manifested irritation, and his face was drawn into angry wrinkles.

Five blocks they went, and then he turned and ascended the steps of a fairly good house. He said nothing to Alexander, and the latter was equally mute. The stranger used a key, opened the door, entered and swung the door to again.

The pursuit was over.

Leland had seen fit to let him go as soon as he wished. Bravely as the detective had talked, he did not care to take their case to a police station. He still feared that the man was an officer, little as he had acted like one, and if he was too rash, himself, he might hasten unpleasant revelations.

He turned back. A few doors away was a cigar store, and its keeper stood in the doorway, smoking. He had been there when they passed.

Alexander stopped, bought a cigar, lighted it and exchanged a few trivial remarks. He had something more important to say, however. He approached the subject cautiously.

"This is a fine weed."

"I fancy it's as good a ten as there is in New York," replied the dealer, pleased.

"A good article. You ought to do a good trade; I don't see any rival in your line near. I suppose you sell to Mr. — Well, the name has gone out of my mind all of a sudden. I mean the gentleman I passed here with a bit ago."

"Oh, yes; Perkins. He buys of me."

"Queer I couldn't think of his name, but I know him very slightly. Isn't he in the Stock Exchange?"

"Not to my knowledge. As far as I know he has no business; I never saw any sign of it. I take it he is a man of leisure."

"Or possibly a detective, eh?" and Alexander forced a laugh.

"Well, I did use to think he was just that—a private detective. Still, I don't know. He may be in anything, for all of my knowledge of him. I questioned him once on that very head, but he didn't give me any light. Here is another cigar I like, myself. Won't you try this, too?"

Alexander said he would, and he pocketed it accordingly. He and the dealer made several wise remarks about the virtues of certain sorts of tobacco, and then he took his departure without saying more about the man of mystery.

"Perkins, eh?" he mused, as he wended his way homeward. "Perkins! Not an unheard-of name by any means. The cigar-dealer used to think he was a private detective! Well, that may be a good deal nearer the mark than the man knew of when he said it. I shall make it my way to learn more of Perkins."

Walking rapidly, Alexander was soon home. He went in quickly, and soon opened his own door. He looked around for Theodore. He saw nothing of him. He looked more closely, and the result alarmed him.

Theodore was gone!

CHAPTER XXVII.

GONE! WHERE?

Alexander was surprised and alarmed. He could not understand the disappearance of his brother. What had happened since his own departure? Had an officer come and taken Theodore into custody?

This point, at least, he thought he could settle by seeing the people of the house, and he was about to seek them when he noticed a sheet of note-paper on the table which, he was sure, had not been there when he was last in the room before.

He moved forward and caught it up.

There was writing upon the page.

"From Theodore!"

With this surprised exclamation the detective began to read rapidly. The note ran as follows:

"Brother—I am about to make use of your absence to leave this house. I cannot longer consent to remain and put you in jeopardy. I have no right to drag you down with me, if I fall. Your honored name must not be smirched.

"I leave, but I go I know not where. I have the money you gave me yesterday. It is enough for all immediate needs, and when it is done I trust I shall obtain more. Of one thing be assured—not one cent of it shall go in dissipation or folly. I will live wisely, prudently, blamelessly. I am done with the tares of life, and the paradise of the fool.

"Where shall I go? I know not. New York is big; I shall find room somewhere. I shall go to the cheapest of places, and among the most humble of the human kind. I shall seek the garret or the basement of the poor, and the poorer the better. I shall hide myself where the bloodhounds of the law rarely come, and the light of day, never! I go to these retreats, not in bitterness, but in relief. The deeper the solitude and the darker the recess, the better for my purpose.

"Brother, words are weak when the heart is swelling with feelings that penetrate to the uttermost depth of one's nature. Eloquence and learning grow weak when emotions as deep as mine are to be expressed. I am not eloquent, and I have nothing to sustain me in the overflow of my feelings.

"I can only say that I feel deeply your many and rich kindnesses to me. I have not deserved them, but they have been given with the freedom of your noble nature. All are remembered, and if I were a dog I could lick the dust from your feet in gratitude. Strong words? No, no; they are feeble in comparison with my feelings.

"Noblest of brothers, for a space, farewell. I hope we shall meet again. I would give my right hand to face you, free from all stain and all doubts, and be

able to say: 'I have tasted deep of sin, but I am redeemed by suffering, by penitence, by reformation, true and heart-felt.'

"Alexander, for your goodness and kindness, may you have the blessing of a Power which knows all, remembers all, rewards all that is good. He will reward you.

"I could write much more, but I dread your return. I must go; I must flee while I can. Would you have me stay? No, no! I will not enmesh you in my weight of sorrow and crime. I go to my garret! Be at ease as to my future. I shall do very well, and I shall no longer be so much of a menace to you. It is better so. May Providence be with and guard you affectionately and well.

"THEODORE."

The paper fell from Alexander's hand. Deep grief was in his expression.

"Poor boy!" he murmured. "He has taken this thing sadly to heart. Gone? Why, it is the height of rashness. I will follow him; I will bring him back; I will—"

He had moved toward the door, but he realized the uselessness of his undertaking. Theodore had been allowed sufficient time by his absence to make good his escape, and he was doubtless far off then. The fruitless search was abandoned. The detective returned and picked up the letter.

"Mad Theodore!" he exclaimed. "Why did he leave this refuge? He will now be among strangers, and among those who would betray him for a dollar. True, he is no longer clad in gray, and the marks of the fatal night are gone, but he has the blond cast of hair that he can't rid himself of like a garment. Something will betray his secret; he will be ruined, seized, accused, imprisoned!"

Fear inspired the gloomy picture, but presently he found more hope in the future. Theodore was no child, and no stranger to New York. Perhaps the refuge he would find would prove safe.

Alexander studied the letter, without seeing a word there written.

"Poor boy!" he murmured again.

A few moments of troubled thought, and then he bestirred himself, read the missive once more, opened the stove, cast the sheet inside, lighted a match, set fire to the paper, and watched it burn to a black mass. He had not dared to retain such incriminating evidence. He returned to his chair and once more murmured:

"Poor boy! Poor brother!"

Not long did he keep his seat. Despite his belief that it would be useless to seek for Theodore, he could not remain inactive. He arose, went out into the street and began a search which he kept up for an hour.

He found nothing, and finally returned, undressed, threw himself on the bed and promptly fell asleep. Eight hours of deep and restful slumber followed, and the light of day was in his room when he woke.

He missed Theodore keenly, but there was no help for it. The once-erring brother was gone, and so was all of the incriminating evidence, as far as he knew. The gray suit had been taken away and burned in a convenient furnace, and the house held no tell-tale secret.

Meditation of this sort brought to mind the stained bit of white cloth which, according to the colored waiter, the chambermaid had secured and given to a mysterious man.

There was no telling when that bit of evidence might appear to make mischief.

Alexander went to the window. Mysterious Mr. Perkins was not to be seen patrolling the block, and, though the observer waited several minutes, he saw no sign of any spy around the street.

Alexander had breakfast, after which he would have gone out, but just then, while he was moving about his room, the colored man came with the announcement that a lady had come to see him.

"What name?" he asked.

"She didn't give none, sah."

"Middle-aged?"

"Not by a considerable interregnum, sah. She is young, an' as pretty as a butter cup."

"The beauty is not of consequence, but you can show her up."

It was nothing strange for Alexander to have callers on professional matters, and he thought nothing of it. But he was more interested when he saw that it was Aola Oliver.

She looked eager and excited, and opened the conversation at once.

"I have come on a peculiar errand," she announced. "May I begin it with a question?"

"Certainly, and I will answer to the point unless I think it contrary to prudence."

"It will surprise you. I have found something that I do not understand, and it does not seem that it can be of interest to you, yet the coincidence of names—but you shall hear. I have been seeking among my father's effects, and, in an old chest, long disused, I have found a paper that you must see."

"I presume it concerns the present case."

"On the contrary, it is ten years old. What was your father's name?"

"Edward Leland," replied Alexander, with a start.

"You amaze me. The paper concerns him."

"Concerns Edward Leland? Where is it? Give it to me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PAPER FROM THE CAPTAIN'S CHEST.

The detective had grown excited. He had not forgotten the connection that, according to Josh Rockaway, the late Captain Dick Oliver had with the voyage of the "Grayhound," and Aola had stirred the son of Edward Leland to a surprising degree.

He saw her holding a paper partially concealed, and he reached out his hand impulsively.

"I would gladly ask you more, first," the girl replied, "but it shall be as you say. Here it is."

Aola passed over a closely-folded paper. Alexander seized and unfolded it hurriedly. A few lines of writing were visible, and he read them speedily. Following a date, in full, they were couched thus:

"This is to certify that I have this day received of Edward Leland, of the County and City of New York, the sum of twenty-two thousand dollars, and that I am to invest the same for him to the best of my judgment. Now, therefore, I, the undersigned Elias Warrington, do promise to pay to the said Edward Leland, his heirs, or assigns, the above-mentioned sum on the return of the schooner 'Grayhound' from her present voyage, with such increase as may result from the investment in her cargo."

Alexander read and then looked up quickly.

"But the signature—the signature!" he cried.

"There was none."

"Not signed?"

"No."

The detective turned the paper over with deep disappointment pictured on his face.

"You see all there was," pursued Aola.

"Miserable fact!" Alexander murmured.

"Does it mean that the document was drawn up but never signed?"

"So it seems."

"But there may have been a payment, nevertheless."

"There was none."

"You are Edward Leland's son. Was it this same Edward?"

"Yes."

"Have you never been paid?—neither you nor your father?"

It dawned upon the detective that he had been saying a good deal to the young woman. He ignored the question and studied the paper.

It was in his father's handwriting, and it told a good deal. Edward had been misjudged when it was thought by his sons that he had handed over his money to Warrington without expecting, or asking, for documentary proof of the fact. It had occurred to him that such proof was needed, and he had drawn up this paper.

Why had it never been signed?

Had Edward Leland seen the business way of protecting his interests, only to fail, in the end, to have himself made secure? Or had there been a duplicate paper which had been duly signed?

Another feature of the case soon occurred to him.

"How did this paper happen to be among your father's effects?" he inquired.

"That I have no means of knowing. I only know it was there."

"Were there no other papers relating to the subject?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why should your father have this?"

"He was once captain of the schooner 'Grayhound,' mentioned in that paper."

"That does not explain how he came by this document. He was neither party to the transaction."

Aola was not looking so eager as when she came in. Alexander's plain agitation at the start, and his keen questions subsequently, showed that he regarded the matter as far more important than she had dreamed it would be. She grew worried. She sought for an explanation, and found one under the impulse of the moment which was better than she could have devised by studied preparation.

"If Mr. Leland knew Elias Warrington he may have known my father, too. This may have been drawn up in father's vessel, and then tossed aside, or into the chest. Or, father may have put it there for safe keeping, and then forgot it when another copy was made."

Alexander saw the possibility, but he was not satisfied. Josh Rockaway had told him things about Captain Dick Oliver that the skipper's daughter did not know, and he was aware that Oliver had been a willing tool for Elias Warrington.

He continued to study the document, and presently Aola asked:

"Is it of any use to you?"

"Legally, no. An unsigned paper counts for but little. Still, I shall be glad to retain it, and it may serve some good end. I think I can make some use—"

He paused as his gaze caught sight of something on the back of the paper. He went closer to the window. Pencil marks were visible, and after considerable study, he made them out in the form of words. He read as follows:

"Duplicate. The other is signed by Warrington. Keep awhile."

Alexander's brows knit. He believed he understood the words. The careless scrawling of the letters, and the off-hand, unceremonious choice of words were alike suggestive of something done in an idle moment. It was as if Edward Leland—it was in his writing—had done it all without much thought and less object.

Whatever may have been the truth of the matter, there stood an important record in his own writing. "Duplicate. The other is signed by Warrington!" Alexander's face was firm, and it told no tales, but he missed nothing of the significance of these words.

After all, Warrington had signed a document in which he admitted his financial obligation to Edward Leland. What had become of it?

He turned his gaze again upon Aola.

"You say you are sure there is nothing more in the chest that bears on this subject?"

"I am positive, sir. I have looked carefully at every paper in the chest, and at everything else. There is no more that could interest anybody but myself, and the interest of the rest of the old collection is merely that which a father's papers, and odds and ends, have to a daughter."

"Well, Miss Oliver, I am like you. As I said before, an unsigned paper counts for nothing in law, but I am a son of Edward Leland, and this paper will interest me as a keepsake, if you will allow me to retain it."

"You can do so, certainly, sir."

Aola paused, studied Alexander's face and presently added slowly:

"You say no payment was made. Did Elias Warrington wrong your father out of money?"

Ordinarily the detective would have been slow to confess the truth, but something moved him to impulsively exclaim:

"This paper speaks of an obligation of twenty-two thousand dollars. Warrington stole every cent of it!"

"Then, don't you see what a villain he is?"

"Plainly!"

Aola rose and went to the detective's side quickly. Her eyes were beginning to blaze with a light Alexander had seen in them before. Intensely she exclaimed:

"Then we have mutual cause to act against him. He is your enemy and mine. More, he is a murderer. Can't we make common cause against him?"

"We seem to be doing so."

"We must redouble our zeal, our vigilance, our rapidity of action. We must get him in the net. I have a just vengeance to satisfy; you have a fortune to recover."

Alexander laid his finger on the document.

"It is not signed!" he reminded, gloomily.

"Where is the other paper? There must have been one. This would have been signed if another had not taken its place. Where is the one that had Elias Warrington's name on it?"

"It never has been found, and the oblivion of ten years stretches between me and success."

"What! Do you falter?"

"Once I searched long and carefully. I failed. What can I do now?"

"Be up and doing!" exclaimed Aola, with emphasis. "Search further! Work! Redouble your zeal. Wrest the secret from the oblivion of time!"

"Brave words, Miss Oliver, and I could well echo them, but I see the practical side of the question. My father's papers failed to contain anything when he died. Captain Oliver's papers contain no more than a suggestion of the truth. Where can search be made further?"

Aola fell back a step. She saw the logic of the argument.

"True, true!" she murmured.

She fell into deep thought. Alexander watched her closely. Hope died hard, and as he remembered how deeply Richard Oliver must have been in the plot, he could not abandon the shadowy possibility that the dead mariner's belongings might hold more of value to him.

"If you could only find Nathan Maynard!" Aola finally murmured.

"Who is he?"

"I know not what he is. He was—ten years ago—a lawyer of unenviable reputation and miserable life. He was noted as a lawyer on nautical affairs. Find him and there may be hope. Find Nathan Maynard!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLD GEORGE HAS A FRIGHT.

Aola had thrown out a new ray of hope, and the detective quickly inquired:

"Why should this Nathan Maynard know of anything that can benefit me in this case?"

"He was intimate with Elias Warrington. That I well remember now—and my father knew him, too."

She added the last words with some reluctance, and Alexander could not fail to see that she did not feel proud of the acquaintance.

"Was Maynard counsel for Warrington?" he asked.

"I can but guess at it. The lawyer was a noted figure at that time. He had unusual abilities, and might have been a lawyer of high standing—so people said—but he had been dragged low down by drink. His resorts were the bar-rooms of New York; his associates, the frequenters of such places, and from them came much of his trade."

She paused, hesitated, and then hastily added:

"My father knew him because he was a nautical lawyer, sir."

She looked at the detective as if challenging him to deny the explanation, but

he merely nodded. It was not his ambition to attack or defend Captain Dick Oliver's reputation.

"Yes," she resumed, quickly, "Maynard had many cases relating to the sea, to vessels, and to sailors and those who shipped cargoes on vessels. It was in this way my father knew him. Now, just how intimate he was with Elias Warrington I can't say, but this I do remember. Warrington and Maynard were around much together just before the schooner 'Grayhound' sailed on her last and fatal voyage; and from my father I had the impression that the other two men were old associates. Now, if this was so, would not Maynard be called in to draw up any needed document between Warrington and Edward Leland? Would not he know of this missing paper?"

Quickly Alexander asked:

"Where is Maynard now?"

"Alas, where? I can't tell you. He was on his last legs, as the neighborhood expressed it, then, and he continued to go down, down, down! He drank more and more as time passed, and finally sank so low that no business came to him. Body and mind weakened under his dissipation; he became a mere wreck, and then—he disappeared from my sight and knowledge."

"Don't you know where he went?"

"No."

"Who does?"

"I can't tell."

"Had he no friends?"

"What friends does the drunkard have, when his money is gone?"

"But all men have relatives."

"Nathan Maynard had them, I presume, before he fell. I think it safe to say he lost even them when he took to the whisky bottle."

"He may be dead."

"True."

"We can't delve in Potter's Field to get his secrets. You have interested me, and I shall make inquiries in your ward for this wreck of a lawyer. I fear it will be useless."

Alexander put the paper away, and Aola seized the chance to change the subject.

"Have you any more evidence against Elias Warrington in regard to his murder of my father?"

"I regret to say that light has not yet dawned."

"But, surely, you have come around to my way of thinking?—you now believe it was Warrington who did the deed, do you not?"

"Miss Oliver, I am at a stage of proceedings where I do not feel that I can properly state what I know and suspect. Believe me, however, I shall do all that is possible to solve the mystery of Captain Oliver's death, and I doubt not that I shall succeed."

Aola looked disappointed, but her own faith was such that she proceeded to argue the case for several minutes and affirm her continued confidence in Warrington's guilt.

When this was done, she was content to go, and she went, accordingly. Left alone, Alexander took out the paper and studied it carefully and thoughtfully.

"Probably only the rough draft," he murmured. "But it tells that our poor father did not wish to trust to luck and Warrington's honesty. Was another paper really signed? If so, what became of it? Was it stolen from him just before, or after, his death?"

Time wore on. The detective put the paper away, but fell into meditation just as deep as ever. Presently he arose abruptly.

"I must try it!" he exclaimed.

He prepared for the street, and went out. He moved away with the air of one with a fixed purpose. His mind, however, was not always on the business in hand. He did not forget Theodore. The younger brother had gone out of his life. Where? What roof, if any, sheltered him? How was he faring? When would he be heard from again? Was he safe from the people who believed that the man in gray had slain Captain Dick Oliver?

These questions were in his mind, but he suddenly had food for other thought. He chanced to see Mr. Perkins, the former

shadow of his own block, moving rapidly along a side street. He, too, had a business air, and Alexander was not in such haste that he could afford to ignore him.

He fell in behind the ex-shadow and went where he went.

The pursuit was not long. Perkins stopped a few blocks away, produced a key and admitted himself to a certain house. The door closed. What secrets did it hide?

Alexander considered anew and decided that he could let this part of his work rest a few hours. He walked off on his former errand.

When he stopped again it was at Elias Warrington's house. He rang the bell and Mrs. Gordon appeared. This was just as he desired it. He nodded briskly.

"All going well, madam?" he inquired.

"As well as can be, now things are this way," she replied.

"Nothing new?"

"Nothing especial, sir. Nothing except that we are short-handed here now."

"How is that?"

"James Black has left us, sir."

"Ah! Got a better situation, I dare say."

"We don't know. He left suddenly, sir; didn't tell anyone he was going. I sent him out to buy a cake of yeast, and he went and never has returned."

"How do you account for that?"

"I don't know what to think of it, sir. Old George Gray is fearful that James has met with some mishap, but I think perhaps not, sir."

"Very likely James is all right; I would not worry about him, if I were you. I think James is safe. Madam, I am now going up-stairs. May I trouble you to send George Gray to me?"

"Certainly, sir."

Persis looked as if she would like to open conversation on other subjects, but she refrained and went to summon her fellow servant. The detective mounted the stairs and, once on the second floor, entered the room at the rear. He looked around and nodded with satisfaction. Then he stepped out into the hall.

In a short time he heard steps on the stairs. They were slow and labored, and it seemed as if somebody's limbs or mind was not responding to the emergency properly.

Presently the gray head of old George Gray appeared to sight, and Alexander saw a pair of anxious eyes turned his way. Old George did not seem more feeble than ever, but his ascent was very moderate, if not reluctant.

Finally, he reached the top and stood looking at Alexander. The latter said nothing, but his face had an exceedingly solemn and unnatural expression. The old servant seemed to feel it painful, and he moved restlessly and then himself broke the seemingly ominous pause:

"Goo-ood morning, Mr. Leland," he quavered.

The detective remained silent, but motioned mysteriously for Mr. Gray to approach him. Old George looked startled, but he was somehow drawn forward in spite of himself. He approached very slowly, his eyes fixed upon the detective. Worse yet, the detective's eyes were fixed on old George, and there was that in their depths that filled the beholder with terror.

"Wha—wha—what is it?" he gasped.

"Sh!"

With this mysterious and impressive caution, Alexander took his companion by the sleeve and drew him forward. Old George could hear his heart beating like a drum, and he would have fled if he could—fled from a terror which was the more awful because it was mysterious and unseen—but he could not get his legs in motion the right way.

He went on until they were at the door of the rear room. When Alexander essayed to pull him across the threshold, the servant rebelled slightly. He rebelled in vain. Exerting a little more force, his captor pulled him fully in and closed the door.

Alexander still preserved his preternatural gravity, and he took position between old George and the avenue of retreat.

He spoke in a deep, strange voice.

"George, we are in the room where Captain Dick Oliver died. Here—here his blood was shed—here his life went out. Horrible fact. He died by murder dark and foul!"

Old George looked around wildly, as if he expected to meet with prompt and terrible calamity.

"Fatal room!" pursued the detective. "Room of accursed deeds and direst mystery! Look at yonder bed. There, there, on that very spot the sailor's precious life went out! Murder most dark and terrible! Fatal room! Why is it so silent when murder has been done here? One would expect the very walls to cry out against the deed done in their sight. One would expect the spirit of the slain mariner to appear, pale, shadowy and stern, to accuse the perpetrator of the deed. Awful room!"

No tragedian ever assumed a more impressive air than the crafty detective, and, as he had a vulnerable subject to work upon, he added fresh terror to his companion's troubled mind.

Old George fairly shook; his face was ghastly; he was almost at the point of collapse.

"There," pursued Alexander, in a hollow voice, "there lay the dead man. You saw him. You marked his mangled form and pallid face! Oh! miserable night! Oh! deed of darkness! Life, sacred and precious—life went out here. Recall the sight we all saw on yonder bed! Was it not most terrible?"

"Don't, don't!" gasped old George.

"Terrible sight! Room of dread history! Why, every wall and picture saw it done. Look at yonder portrait! See its eyes turned upon us. To me it seems to have a voice. Why should it not? Think of the dread things it saw! Why shouldn't it have the power of speech in this crisis? Why, I almost imagine it stretching out its hands like a living being and crying: 'There, there is the murderer!'"

A quick forward step Alexander took, and then he stretched out his own hand and leveled the index finger at old George Gray.

"There," he repeated, in a thrilling tone, "there stands the slayer of Captain Oliver!"

The old servant uttered a wild cry. His limbs gave way under him wholly. He fell to his knees. He clasped his hands and his thin, worn face was pale as the dead.

"Mercy, mercy," he gasped. "I did not do it!"

"Then who did?" sharply demanded Alexander.

"I don't know!"

"You know something, sir! From the first you have kept something back. Do not dare to hide your secret longer! Justice is reaching out for you; this is no time to play the double-dealer. Speak! What do you know?"

He seized old George by the shoulder and compressed the member until the old man was in actual pain. He hovered over his companion, his face full of threatening and terrible passion. If he had been startling before in a ghostly way, he was now quite as much so in a more practical manner.

"Speak!" he added, forcibly.

"I don't know who did the murder—"

"You know something, sir. Out with it! Will you speak?"

"Yes, yes!" gasped old George. "I will tell all. I have harmed nobody—I will tell all I can."

CHAPTER XXX.

FOUR MINUTES BEFORE THE TRAGEDY.

Groveling at the detective's feet the miserable old man poured forth his words, and voice, expression and manner were alike eloquent with anguished pleading. Alexander Leland was sorry for the dismay he had caused, but he had a duty to perform, and he adhered to it inexorably.

"What do you know?" he demanded, sternly.

"Nothing important—"

"What?"

"It was only that I saw Mr. Elias War-

Warrington go into Captain Oliver's room just before the alarm was given."

"Rise!"

The detective extended his arm and pulled old George Gray to his feet. He had learned enough so that he could afford to loosen the screws a little.

"So Warrington went in, eh?" he replied.

"Yes, but—oh, sir! he never harmed Captain Oliver—I know he never did. I have worked for him for thirty years, sir, and it would be a shocking disgrace if anything unpleasant happened now!"

The aged servitor was still pleading, and even more by manner and tone than by words. Alexander remained calm and easy.

"Just go into details. Explain all you know, George."

"You won't harm Mr. Warrington, will you? He has done no wrong. It was only chance, sir, that he went in—"

"George, I will hear your story now!"

Sharp was the detective's speech, and old George saw that he would have to give way to the stronger power.

"It was like this, sir," he meekly explained. "That night that the captain was killed I had a bad turn of neuralgia after I went to bed, and I finally arose to go to the kitchen and get some medicine I use for the trouble."

"You sleep on the upper floor, I believe?"

"I do, sir. Well, I was going down when I saw—this! The hall was lighted, and as I stepped on the upper stair of the flight above I saw some one move below. I stopped and looked down. There was Mr. Elias Warrington, sir, in his dressing-gown."

"In the hall of this floor?"

"Yes, sir. The hour was late, and I was surprised to see him moving about. More, he never likes to have anybody astray in the house after we are supposed to be in bed; so I stood still."

"And watched?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you see?"

"Mr. Warrington entered Captain Richard Oliver's room."

"What next?"

"He closed the door and I saw no more. While I hesitated it occurred to me that my neuralgia had abated, so, as I didn't want Mr. Warrington to see me about the halls, I turned and went back up-stairs and to my own room."

"And then, and then?"

Old George's voice had been gaining strength, but it now began to shake painfully again as he resumed:

"I had not been in bed more than three minutes, sir, when the—the alarm came!"

"What alarm?"

"The outcry! The wild cries of fear and pain from Captain Oliver's room. Oh, sir; don't ask me to speak of that!"

"I will not, George. Let us, however, be exact about this. Was the house alarmed at once? Or was this some time before the actual alarm? Make that clear."

"It was the actual alarm itself. Within ten minutes everybody in the house knew that Captain Oliver was dead."

"Did you hasten down?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I was scared out of my wits, sir."

"Did you suspect what had occurred?"

"I remembered that Mr. Warrington had gone into Captain Oliver's room—that is, sir, I thought a burglar might be there. There was one, you know, sir."

"What more can you tell?"

"Nothing, Mr. Leland. All has been told before. You know that Mr. Maurice Everton, James Black and myself arrived in the hall at about the same time. We ran into the captain's room and found him with his death-grasp on the murderer, that Rattlefoot. Yes, sir; he had the murderer fast."

Old George clung to his expressed idea stoutly, and seemed bound not to leave any room for doubt that Rattlefoot had done the deed.

"How do you account for your master having gone into the room just previous to the affair?"

The servant stood speechless.

"Also, why have you not told of this before?" proceeded Alexander.

"Why, sir—why, sir—I thought it was not important."

"George, you are an honest man, and nature never intended you to be a hypocrite. When you try to be disingenuous you are as deep as water in a basin—you can be seen through easily. George, don't play with me any longer. Confess that you have concealed this because you knew it would point accusingly at Warrington."

"Well, sir—well, sir—yes, that is so; that was my motive. I did see that my master would be placed in a false position. For he is innocent of all complicity with the affair; he surely is. Why, he must be innocent—I have worked in this house over thirty years."

Old George stretched out his thin hands, and, with voice and manner, and gesture, implored Alexander to believe him. In point of fact, he had no especial reason to feel affection for Elias Warrington, but his long connection with the family, and his own reputation—so he regarded the case—demanded that there be a complete clearing of Elias."

"Are you sure you did not see Warrington leave the captain's room?"

"I did not see him go, sir."

"Why should he enter at all?"

"He—he may have gone for a match, Mr. Leland."

"And then followed the murder. You say you had not been in bed more than three minutes when the alarm sounded. Then the alarm came just about four minutes after Warrington entered the room."

"But he had had time to leave."

"You fight stoutly for your master. I admire your devotion, but the cause is not a good one. George, you have been hiding this secret too long. All the while I have seen that you were keeping something back. Innocent though you were yourself, you have been keeping another's secret to the injury of your body and mind. You have grown thin and weak under the strain. Throw off the burden now. Is there more to tell?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Leland," replied the servant, and it was clear that he told the truth.

"What do you think of James Black?"

"His disappearance is peculiar, sir, but I think he will return."

"Do you think he had guilty connection with the murder?"

"I can't believe so, sir."

"I am confident that somebody admitted that man Rattlefoot. Who was it; if not James Black?"

"Well, Mr. Leland, I know nothing about this. James and I have been friends. I should be surprised to hear that he admitted anybody to do harm here; I should really. Be that as it may, Mr. Warrington is innocent."

"You return persistently to that subject. George, do you remember that Mr. Warrington declared that he had not been up-stairs at all that night? Your story contradicts his, point blank. I know you tell the truth; it is evident in your every inflection and look. Now, why did Warrington lie? He was guilty of that? How much further does his guilt go?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

GREGGS TELLS OMINOUS NEWS.

Old George Gray raised his hand to his forehead and then rubbed away with a slow and perplexed motion. He could not see the way clear to explain the mystery of his master's actions satisfactorily.

"Warrington told me," repeated Alexander, "that he did not go up-stairs at all. You say he was there, and entered Oliver's room just before the crime was committed. Hence, he spoke falsely. Why need he lie? Why, unless he was guilty?"

"Oh! that can't be!" declared the servant.

"Forbear, George. You have already done enough for Elias Warrington. You are a man of honor and fine feeling. Your heart is tender, and you would not harm the most worthless animal. You have faithfulness in a marked degree. I admire

your nature, but don't carry it too far. Don't make yourself Warrington's defender."

Old George sighed deeply.

"Do you know of any reason why your master should want Oliver out of the world?"

"No, sir."

For the first time George spoke with real freedom; he had found something he could assert with a clear conscience.

"You know of no quarrel?"

"None, sir."

"No old grudge?"

"No."

"Then we will drop it. I think you will feel better, now you have told your story. The burden you have carried has been a heavy one. It has worried you deeply, and has caused deep lines on your face. Try to eradicate them, now. If Warrington is innocent he will get into no trouble with the law. If he is guilty you don't want to be his defender. Remember this, and give your troubled mind a rest. That will do, George."

Pausing only to exact a promise of secrecy from the servitor, the detective left the house. He saw nothing of Warrington as he went.

As he moved down the block he smiled slightly as he thought of the method he had used to bring old George to terms.

"That would never have worked with Persis Gordon," he mused. "I did not mistake my man. Gray has his peculiarities, and he has worried over this until he was keyed up to just the right pitch. I struck at the right time, too. It would have been a useless piece of dramatics had I tried it sooner."

More serious thoughts soon occupied the detective's mind.

George Gray's story had been important. It was proved that Elias Warrington had entered Captain Oliver's room only a brief time before the murder was committed—about four minutes previously, it seemed—and the fact was impressive.

It seemed impossible to acquit the master of the house of the charge which Mrs. Gordon and Aola had persistently made against him.

"But," muttered Alexander, "if I take this view of it, how am I to account for Rattlefoot alone was guilty of the deed. If so, there was no need of his coming into the house secretly, and I am sure that James Black did admit him secretly. It is a puzzling case, even now."

It was all of that, but his belief that Rattlefoot alone was guilty of the deed was weakened. He saw no means of exonerating Warrington fully in the face of the newest evidence.

"I might accept the theory that he hired Rattlefoot to do it, and was himself present, or near the spot, but—"

"Mr. Leland, can I speak with you?"

The voice sounded close beside him, and he paused and looked. A saddy-looking man stood waiting with the air of an inferior seeking to be assured of a welcome.

"Of course you can speak," the detective replied. "It seems to me your face is familiar—"

"You saw me at the hotel, you know."

"I remember, now."

It was not a pleasant recollection. A few weeks before Alexander had called at the miserable hotel where Theodore had been living. A note from the proprietor had informed him that his brother needed help because he was ill.

He had gone; he had seen Theodore and given him help, but he had done it with the conviction that the illness had been brought on by too free use of drink. The man who now stood before the detective had occupied a room next to Theodore's, and he had been helpful in the emergency.

But this man, too, had been a never-dowell, and he had left a melancholy picture on the detective's mind. He, too, seemed to need somebody to lift him out of the gutter.

"Name, Greggs," humbly added the person.

"Yes, Mr. Greggs. What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to speak of—of Mr. Leland, your brother, you know."

"What of him?"

"He has suddenly and strangely left the hotel, sir."

"Did he owe anybody?"

"No, sir."

"Then we will not bother about him. It is all right, I think."

Greggs twisted himself about and looked embarrassed.

"There is something more, sir."

"What?"

"I hesitate to tell you—"

"Out with it, man; out with it!"

"It may be unpleasant, and I don't want to offend—"

"Never mind that. Out with it!"

Mr. Greggs twisted again and seemed more inclined to run than speak. Whatever was on his mind was troubling him.

"Well, sir, if you say so, I will proceed, but I wish you to understand, at the start, that I do it as a friend. Theodore is a nice fellow, and he is your brother, and you are a police officer, and—"

"And so you can proceed freely. Go on!"

"Well, sir, it is like this. Theodore has left the hotel sudden and peculiar, and this was some days ago."

Alexander could well believe it, and he knew the disappearance dated from the time when his brother came and found shelter under his own roof. He began to be worried by Gregg's backwardness, but he patiently reminded him that he had told all that before, and asked him to proceed to something new. Gregg was reluctant, but he managed to raise his courage to the point of action.

"Well, sir, it was like this. The night before he went away I retired to my bed at the usual time. I felt lonely. I was out of money and couldn't go around, and Theodore had been out ever since early in the day. He and I had been more friendly with each other since he was sick, and I missed him a good deal that evening. All I could do was to pack off to bed, so off I went."

"I had been asleep, I don't know how long, when I was woke up rather violent. I had put out the light, but it was burning again, and there stood Theodore."

"The way he was looking scared me; he wasn't like himself. His clothes were all mussed up, and his face was just awful—the expression of it, I mean. His eyes were wild and bloodshot, and, altogether, he just frightened me out of my wits."

"He didn't say nothing, and I sat there in bed and looked at him. My heart was going like a trip-hammer, and I felt sure something terrible was up."

"What's the trouble?" I finally managed to ask.

"Who said there was trouble?" he snapped back, sharply.

"You look it," says I. "What have you been doing?"

"With that he broke into a wild laugh."

"Nothing but murder!" says he.

"Murder?" I gasped.

"Yes, that's what I've been doing," says he. "Don't I look it? Don't the cloven hoof show in all ways?"

"Now, sir, I could see plainly that he had been drinking—he was steady enough on his feet, but it showed all over—and I tried to make a laugh of it. I said something jovial, but he snapped at me like a dog again."

"Don't you think I am fooling," says he. "I am in dead earnest! Rum has done for me, at last, and I am booked for the electric chair. I have just come from the scene of slaughter. Don't I look it?"

"You look like you've been drinking," says I.

"So I have, more fool I!" says he. "It was that led me into this accursed scrape. I lost my head; I struck the blow like a fool. We all come to it, sooner or later, if we drink whisky."

"It began to dawn on me that he meant it all, and I was scared to death. I liked him, and was sorry to see him in such trouble."

"Where was it? Who was it?" says I.

"That seemed to touch his prudence, for he suddenly changed his manner. He looked at me suspicious."

"Wouldn't you like to have me tell?"

says he. 'Like to have me give you enough so you could go and betray me, wouldn't you?'"

"Why, old man, I wouldn't do that," says I.

"You won't get the chance," he snaps. "I was only fooling, anyhow. Don't you worry. I've got a good, solid head on my neck, and I don't get into any trouble. Of course I was joking."

"Just then somebody tried the door—Theodore had bolted it after him; something I rarely did—and what do you think? Theodore made a wild dive and tried to squeeze in under the bed."

"Save me, save me," he gasped. "It's the officers after me!"

"Now, I suppose it was some other boarder who mistook my room for his; anyhow, he moved along and there proved to be no danger; but Theodore was shaking with terror."

"I spoke to him some more about what he had said, but he persisted that he had been joking, and, as I didn't want to worry him, I let it go at that. I saw he was all worked up and nervous, and so I urged him to go to bed."

"He agreed to do it, and did go to his own room, but for an hour I heard him moving about restlessly, and once I heard him cry out in alarm: 'They are after me! I shall be arrested!' Well, I finally fell asleep. When I woke up Theodore was gone. He hasn't been seen since."

"I have been dreadfully worried about him, and I've hunted far and near for him, but I haven't found him. I didn't like to tell you, for fear you would blame him, but it's got to be too serious to be kept any longer. He has disappeared—gone wholly."

Greggs finished his story and stood looking anxiously at Alexander. It was clear to the latter that Theodore had gone directly to Gregg's room after leaving Warrington's that fatal night, but he saw fit to present a different view to Gregg.

"Theodore has been drinking too much."

"Do you think that was it?"

"Yes."

"I wish I could think so, but, sir, I've read a description of the man in gray who was at the Warrington house, and Theodore was dressed just that way—gray clothes and all. And he said he had killed somebody. Why did he say that, unless it was true?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT OTHERS HAD FOUND.

The question jarred upon Alexander's nerves. In every way Gregg showed that he was sincere, and just as plainly that he was actuated by friendly concern for Theodore Leland. He had studied the subject a good deal, and the fear that he had expressed was keeping company with real worry over Theodore.

For a moment the detective wavered. Was Theodore guilty? To him he had asserted that he did not know whether he was guilty of doing violence to Captain Dick Oliver. To Gregg he had avowed his guilt, and then he was fresh from the scene of tragedy.

More, Alexander did not forget the stain of blood on his sleeve.

A moment he wavered, and then all of his dogged loyalty to Theodore returned.

"Mr. Greggs," he replied, quietly, "we need not give this thought. Sprung upon you as it was, it is not strange that you should be moved by the coincidences—they are no more. Happily, I have the best of evidence that Theodore was not concerned in the affair."

Greggs brightened up perceptibly.

"Good, good!" he exclaimed.

"You see, he had been drinking heavily that night, and he happened to hear of the slaying of Captain Oliver. His disordered mind seized upon the affair, and he became all excited and upset by it. Still, it was only the madness of drink."

"I am very glad to hear of that, sir."

"The madness of drink," Alexander repeated.

"I fear," added Gregg, hesitatingly, "that Theodore and I have not always lived wisely. I have been thinking this

morning, and I had about arrived at a firm resolution. It is wholly firm now. From this time on I shall drink no more. The accursed stuff has taken my money, my friends and my brains—all have gone from me through drink. I am not yet an old man; there is time for me to reform, if I begin now. I will begin! I swear it!"

"Mr. Greggs, you never made a wiser resolution."

"I shall keep it. But about Theodore. Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is, just now, but he is straightening out after his over-indulgence. He will come around all right."

"That's good news, Mr. Leland. You don't blame me for telling you of this, sir?"

"Not in the least. I am glad you have done it."

Greggs was pleased, and he said a few words more in his humble, deferential way, and then took his departure. He left Alexander less pleased than he was.

Doubts and misgivings crowded upon the detective. Theodore, fresh from the house of tragedy, had plainly avowed to Gregg that he had done a deed of violence. Had this been true?—had he positively known it then, and forgotten it after sleeping off his debauch?

"I will not believe it!" stubbornly muttered Alexander. "It was said to Gregg in delirium. It cannot—it surely is not true. It is not in Theodore's nature to harm anybody. He is innocent!"

It was a loyal decision, but an outsider would not have been so lenient to the younger Leland brother.

The detective stepped off with the manner of one who had a settled purpose in his course. He had been looking into the private history and associates of Rattlefoot, and wanted to see some of them. What hope he had of learning anything was a problem, but it was worth trying.

He had ascertained where the prisoner had lived before going near the Everton residence. It was a so-called "hotel" much like that where Hugh Davidson lived, and to this place the detective took his way.

He had two names in his mind, and when he arrived he inquired:

"Is Mr. Carroll in?"

"No," replied the clerk.

"Mr. White?"

"He is in his room, I think. It is No. 91."

Alexander went up. He rapped at the door, and a voice bade him enter. He obeyed and found a stout man seated at a table with a row of cards spread out before him.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "Come in! I was just running off a few poker hands, to see how they would fall. I don't know you, but you can come into the game, if you wish."

It was a bluff greeting, but Alexander shook his head.

"I don't care to play now. I want to talk with you about a mutual acquaintance—Charles Davidson."

The stout man pushed the cards away from him.

"Do you know Charley?" he asked, quickly. "He's in a deuce of a fix, ain't he?"

"He is not in the best of luck, sure."

"Still, he is innocent, and those police jays will find it out. They are all on the wrong track."

"Just what I wanted to talk to you about. I thought you would know more about it than anybody else."

"Not so much as Timmy Carroll. He and Charley were always hand-in-glove. Neither of them ever sneezed without telling the other of it. Timmy knows all of Charley's private business."

"I suppose he is just as sure of Charley's innocence as you are?"

"Yes, but Timmy is dead worried. He realizes that Charley is in a confounded fix, you see. Charley has been rather speedy, like the rest of us. Still, he will come out all right."

"Has any valuable evidence been obtained in his behalf?"

"I don't mind saying that such evidence

has been found. We are going to put a twister on that confounded detective, Alexander Leland."

"How is that?"

"Either that Leland is a crook himself, or there is a big shock in store for him."

White's confident air did not worry Alexander.

"How is that?" he asked.

"His brother, Theodore Leland, was the man who killed Oliver!"

White boiled down his assertion with the intention of making a strong impression, and succeeded. His words fell upon Alexander like a thunder-clap, and the detective's heart sank. So somebody else was surely on the trail! It was a terrible revelation to him.

The habit of years of keeping a stolid face in the hour of emergencies was of value then, but Alexander felt that it was insufficient. He struggled to avoid showing emotion, but he felt that his face must tell of the horror that was in his mind.

"You surprise me," he muttered. "How has this been learned?"

"By another detective. He has been on the trail like a bloodhound. Do you remember that a woman named Persis Gordon was mentioned in connection with the murder?"

"Yes."

"She was an inmate of Warrington's house, but she knew Charley Davidson, and had a fancy for him; so what does she do but go and hire a private detective to work for Charley."

Alexander thought of the man Perkins, who had shadowed the block where he lived.

"Who was this detective?" he asked.

"His name is Locke Parsons."

It was not Perkins. Alexander knew Parsons well—a crafty but unscrupulous detective on his own hook. The mystery of Perkins remained unsolved.

"What has Parsons found?" he inquired.

"Well, he set out to have an eye to Alexander Leland. He knew that Leland was a successful man, and it struck him that it would do no harm to keep track of Leland's progress. It was while doing this that he discovered that Alexander had a man in his room—a blond young fellow who was strangely like the man who, according to Charley, ran out of Warrington's house after Oliver was struck down. He looked into it, and learned that when the blond man came to Alexander's he wore a gray suit, and had pinned to his vest a cheap pin with a reddish-hued stone set in it. There you are."

White leaned back and looked very much pleased with everything.

"How is it known that the man was Alexander Leland's brother?"

"He said so himself, Alexander did. And, by the way, he hustled his precious brother into dark clothes right quick. This brother has been a never-do-well, and a hard drinker. It is only in the natural course of events that he should go to this extreme at last."

"But there are other blond men in gray in New York."

"I haven't told you all. Parsons has a memento of the tragedy at Warrington's—so he thinks. He has a piece of white cotton cloth that was once part of a shirt. It has been in a stove, and part of it is blackened and scorched by fire. Enough remains intact, however, to show blood-stains on the cloth. How is that? How does that strike you?"

White little knew how it "struck" his companion. Alexander listened with the greatest dismay. The treachery of the chambermaid, dimly indicated by the colored waiter, was now clear. So was the activity of the rival detective. He had progressed surprisingly, and Theodore Leland was in peril of his life.

"What more is there?" he inquired slowly.

"I know of nothing."

"If Parsons has this down so fine, why hasn't he arrested his man?"

"I think he has arrested him!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DETECTIVE IS ACCUSED.

Alexander looked at White in fresh dismay.

"He has—arrested him?" thickly repeated the detective.

"That's my belief. Nobody but Parsons knows, though. I am told that Theodore Leland has disappeared from his brother's house. Where he is I don't know. My understanding is that Parsons somehow lured him out of the house and then gobbled him. I suppose that Parsons has Mr. Theodore shut up, somewhere, waiting until the right moment to take him to police headquarters."

Blow followed blow. Alexander was speechless. Theodore seized! It was terrible news!

"This is all theory, however," added White. "All I can say positively is that Theodore has gone from his brother's. I suppose that Parsons has him."

"Very likely," responded the visitor, in a low tone.

"It will be great to beat out Aleck Leland! Men call him the Double-Quick Detective, and he has had a big run of luck. Now, just to think of his own brother going to the electric chair. It will be tough on Theodore, but it will wind up the meddling career of Aleck. What a crusher for him! Ha, ha, ha!"

White laughed loudly, and his caller joined in the sound.

"A crusher, sure enough!" he agreed.

"Exit, Mr. Double-Quick."

"But Alexander is not yet fully downed."

"No. I suppose he will fight it out; but, anyhow, Charley Davidson will be clear."

"How about his illegal entrance to Warrington's house? It is said that he confessed he entered to rob the house."

White suddenly became grave.

"That is bad for Charley. I'm afraid we shall have to see him stand trial for that, but he ought to get off easy if he tells on Theodore Leland."

"Maybe he will. What the dickens was there in Warrington's house to tempt him?"

"Between you and me I think he heard something from that Persis Gordon that led to all this. I don't know what it was. He got acquainted with her and made a fool of the woman. Out of this grew his visit to the house. Now, I don't know what it was that took him there. He says plunder; he went to rob. Maybe, but there may have been more to it. Did he really go to rob, or had he some other motive? I haven't a grain of clew to the truth, so I need not speculate. By the way, I have been talking very freely to you, and I don't even know your name. Who in blazes may you be?"

White laughed as he asked, and did not seem at all worried.

"Strong is my name."

"You look it. Good muscles, you've got. Strong by name, and strong by nature. Ha, ha! Excuse the weak joke—By the way, how about a game of poker, old man?"

"I really haven't the time," Alexander replied. "I have a bill to collect, and it won't do to neglect such a matter."

"That's what people think when I owe them. Ha, ha! Going now? Well, call in again and I'll go you at poker. Call around and drink a glass with me when Alexander Leland is downed!"

"Maybe I will."

"Don't mention what I've told you. Leland would like to get it."

"I'll see that it goes no further."

"Good! I made the same promise, but you're a friend of Charley's. If you see Aleck Leland, give my regards to him. Ask him if he wants my help."

"I'll remember. Good-day."

White responded, and the detective took his departure.

"That fellow is a mere sieve," he mused. "He would tell his own secrets without troubling his weak brain. But this thing he has told me about Theodore—Good Heavens! has Parsons really got him under arrest?"

Rapidly the detective moved on, his mind busy with the problem of vital interest that beset him. He was going thus when something impelled him to look across the

street. He saw Hugh Davidson and Private Detective Parsons walking there together. They had not previously seen him, but mutual discovery soon followed. He saw Hugh start, look hard, and then move across the pavement. Parsons more moderately followed, after a low-toned request, Alexander thought, of Hugh that he would not carry out his evident purpose.

Straight for Alexander, however, Davidson made, and Leland quickly discovered two things—Rattlefoot's brother intended to speak to him, and he had been drinking.

"Hello, you!" was his rough greeting. "Have you got that Oliver murderer yet?"

"There is nothing new."

"Isn't there? Now, don't you be so sure of that. You may play the bat and see nothing, but others won't. I say there is something new, and I can prove it!"

"Mr. Davidson," broke in Parsons, quickly, "we shall be late if we try to talk on idle subjects. Let us—"

"Say, you ain't my master!" snapped Davidson.

"I tell you, come along!"

"And I tell you I won't!" doggedly retorted Hugh. "I've got something to say to Mr. Detective Man, here, and I am going to say it. See? Say, Leland, you're playing a fine game, ain't you?"

"I don't know what you refer to," answered Alexander, quietly.

"Why, this Oliver murder. You've got my brother shut up, and you want to send him to the electric chair. You're a scoundrel, sir! You would do this when you know all the while that—"

Parsons caught the speaker by the arm.

"I tell you, come along!" he exclaimed, nervously.

"And I tell you I won't!" snapped Davidson. "I've got a word to say here. Leland, you call yourself an officer. Fine specimen, you are. Set to catch the Oliver murderer, are you? Why, you knave, you knew all the while that your own brother, Theodore Leland, did the deed!"

Davidson was ugly, insolent and threatening. He leaned out toward Alexander and seemed to itch to strike him. Alexander was prepared for the final words, and he icily replied:

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you Theodore did it; and that ain't all. You aided him; you are his accomplice after the crime, if not before. Pretty state of things! You, a detective, have given shelter and protection to a murderer!"

"Nonsense! Go and get sober, Davidson!"

"I am as sober as you are, and I have not given shelter to a murderer. Detective and officer, are you? A fine subject! I've found you out, and all the rest of the world shall do the same. All the while you were trying to bring to death an innocent man, you were housing the real murderer. Scoundrel! I'll expose you! I'll brand you to the whole world! I'll drag you into the dust!"

"Your mind is disordered!"

Alexander was calm. Ordinarily he would not have stood still and been abused thus by the brother of Rattlefoot, but he was willing the fellow should go on and betray his secrets.

"Better that than what you are!" shouted Hugh. "Theodore Leland killed Oliver, and we can prove it. You—you sheltered him, and it is enough to send you to prison. You'll have a fine reputation!"

Just then a fourth man hurried to the spot. He had newly arrived, and he addressed Hugh without heeding anybody else.

"Old man, your brother is free! Charles has escaped from prison!"

"Escaped?" cried Hugh. "Good, good! We'll send Theodore to take his place in the cell!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE OLD MAN OF THE GARRET.

It was a garret in a house on one of the poorest, most miserable and most vicious of the streets of New York. The house was a tenement of the worst sort, as far as appearances went. Old age, de-

cay and dirt had marked it for their own, and the tenants did not dispute possession.

Dirt and decay were visible when one first entered the edifice; they grew more noticeable as one went toward the roof.

In the garret were two men. More than that there was but little. A bedstead with a torn mattress and a wretched quilt; a rickety table and two rheumatic chairs; a few odds and ends—and dirt, dirt everywhere. A more miserable room it would have been hard to find.

One of the men there was in rags, and soiled rags at that. He was sadly in need of a hair-cut, but shears and comb seemed to be strangers to him. He was gray and haggard; he was red of face and bloodshot of eyes.

His companion—strange contrast!—was clean and neatly clad. More, this clean man was Theodore Leland!

The elder man appeared to be happy, if he was in rags, and he suddenly burst out into song.

"A jolly life is the life for me,
With bounding mirth forever free;
Then to Father Time give spur and whip
And urge the nag to a rousing clip.
"Till years go by with lightning dash,
And life is rich as the comet's flash;
Ho! ho! ho! how the ages flee!
A jolly life is the life for me!"

The singer was no artist, and his voice was wheezy, but he sang with spirit and reckless abandon impressive in their way. He swung his arm to keep time, and then wound up by thumping vigorously on the bed on which he lay.

Theodore Leland looked at his companion with curiosity, but he showed no aversion to the ragged man. Theodore had been in questionable company before that evening.

"How is that for a song?" cried the man on the bed. "Composed it myself, and have sung it many's the time. Never appeared before any of the crowned heads, but I'm just as good as they are. I've been a nabob in my day, young man!"

"Your language shows you to be well educated," replied Theodore.

"Ha, ha, ha! Does it? Well, it shows about right. You are no fool, young man, if you do wear good clothes. I've had my day, and a stunning day it was. Am I not having it now? I have money for drink and tobacco—Isn't that about the height of human bliss?"

"Do you think so?"

"I do, and I'll convince you, if you'll stay as my neighbor in this blessed garret. Still, I can't admire you fully until you recede from your refusal to drink good whisky."

Theodore shivered. He had seen enough of drink, and, as intimated, he had steadfastly refused to imbibe with the other man.

"Ho! ho! ho! how the ages flee!
A jolly life is the life for me!"

The vagabond repeated the refrain of his song with such force that the house seemed to ring with the sound.

"Good lungs, eh?" he then laughed. "Ay, ay; my lungs are all right, and I should be the equal of the best of them but for this spinal trouble. Hang the spine! Why was I born with one? Years in and years out I've lain on this bed, crippled by my trouble. Bad, eh? Some people would get the blues under it, but I am of an elastic nature, so here I lie and drink and smoke, and pass the time away. Not so bad after all, is it?"

"A lonely life, I should say."

"For the young it would be, but I am past the froth and bubble of youth. Besides, neighbors drop in and see me. Now that you've come and taken the garret next to mine, I anticipate much more fun. I need your company. More, I like your appearance. Still further," and here the reckless vagabond suddenly grew a trifle serious, "you somehow remind me of somebody I've seen before. I can't tell who. Your name is John Trask, you say?"

"Yes."

A moment of grave meditation, and then the vagabond broke into a hoarse laugh.

"Probably about as near true as mine of Adam Smith. Ho, ho, ho, in this tenement of sin, sorrow and dirt few sail under their real colors. I don't insinuate anything, but I doubt not that some scrape brought you here. All the better. I couldn't chum with a straight-laced person. I don't like the breed."

The speaker fished a bottle out from under his quilt.

"Will you drink?" he asked.

"Thank you, no," Theodore replied.

"I will, thank you!"

Adam Smith did as he said, and then broke into song:

"Ho! ho! ho! how the ages flee!
A jolly life is the life for me!"

Theodore watched the miserable wretch with continued curiosity. He had seen many who faintly resembled Adam, but none just like him. At times Adam had quoted Latin and Greek, and, in all ways, he gave proof that he had been a superior man at some time. No doubt, he had been all he vaguely claimed, once, and the newcomer to the garret wondered what his history had been.

It was to such a place as this, and to such company, that Theodore had drifted. He had fled from Alexander Leland's premises with the intention of hiding among the loneliest and most miserable. He had come to the tenement and hired the attic next to Adam Smith's—he surely had found the lonely and the low there.

Still, he was at liberty, and he had seen no sign that anybody was on his track. Even with rags and dirt all around him he was satisfied, in a measure.

Adam eyed his bottle.

"It is confounded queer how this thing gets empty as it does," he murmured. "The poor have many afflictions, and this is one of them. A poor man's bottle will never stay full. That's where I differ from my bottle—I always stay full. Comprehend?"

"A keen and original joke."

"Original? Egad! It was born before my grandsire was. I used to hear it at college. It is true, however; I've tested it all my life. Young man, I've seen life in my day; I've been among the lofty and the learned. I've met each day with those who dressed well, too, and if I didn't quite shine with them physically, they couldn't take liberties with me mentally. I was a genius then."

"I should like to hear your history."

Adam suddenly changed his manner. He looked sharply and none too amiably at Theodore.

"You would, eh? Why, I wonder? I don't forget that your face brings up recollections of another face. Whose? I don't know—however, I don't care a rap. Young man, if I am reduced to rags and poor whisky I am not here to avoid arrest. Not I! I am here because I have a bad spine, and I can't leave this blessed bed. Five years I've lain here—Where is my solace?"

He produced the bottle and drank again.

He had already drank too much for his own good, and was considerably under the influence of the stuff. He swung the bottle and sang again, and then indulged in a period of silence. It lasted but briefly.

"I'm as good as the best of talent in New York," he persisted, boastfully. "Education, brains and experience, in all ways I can match the professional kings of the city. Young man, do you see yonder trunk?"

He pointed to a very small, toy-like affair of the kind he had named. It stood on the floor near his bed.

Theodore replied affirmatively.

"Set it beside of me."

The order was obeyed. With a key produced from somewhere about his person the vagabond opened the trunk. Many packages of manuscript documents were to be seen, some neatly arranged in packages, and others loose and crumpled.

Adam snatched up the first. Quickly he read a few lines, and then passed it over to Theodore.

"Read!" he directed.

Again Theodore obeyed. It was the appointment of somebody—the name had been erased—to a foreign assistant consular position.

"That was I!" proudly declared Adam. "Look at this!"

He snatched up a second document and passed it over unread by himself. It was a letter from a high state dignitary acknowledging important services rendered by—again the name was erased. Three others followed, all of similar tenor.

"That's a clew to what I once was," pursued Adam. "Thirty years ago, all of them—I've had none in the last twenty, for I've been a drunkard. When I was young honors were forced upon me. Nobody long kept up the trick, but I had a profession—I followed it—I was the peer of any there! Bah! I am now Adam Smith, ragged dog!"

He tossed the papers back in the box, reached for his bottle and drank deeply.

His was a hard head, but it was feeling the effects of his potations. He grew less coherent, but sang his song more loudly. Then he grew drowsy, only to arouse presently with a start; then sleepiness increased and he turned partially over and succumbed wholly. He slept.

Theodore looked at him with varied emotions. Low as the man was he still had traits and gifts not to be despised, and the watcher mused on his miserable condition.

"Genius perverted and destroyed!" he thought. "He has a good head, and brains were once back of it. How he has fallen! I can well understand the cause!" and the young man shivered as he looked at the almost empty bottle.

Adam slept on. He who had once been an assistant consul lay in his fags, dirt and misery. It was a melancholy picture.

"I wonder who he is," ran the current of Theodore's mind. "He has erased all signs of his name, and evidently intends to remain unknown to the end. Assistant consul that was; vagabond that he now is. How he has abused his gifts, how wrecked his manhood! His weakness is despicable; his fall is sad, indeed. Has he relatives who know of his squalor and degradation? Or, is he dead to them? Who was he when he had manhood left?"

Theodore glanced again at the trunk, and at a few papers, that, unseen by their owner, had fallen on the bed. Temptation came to him. Although the chief name was erased it might possibly be deciphered.

Was it fair to try and solve his identity? Theodore hesitated, wavered, yielded. He reached out for one of the papers. He took it; unfolded it; glanced over it.

"Ah! Nothing has been erased in this document. Something must be discoverable here. I think—What? Just heaven, what does this mean?"

Theodore clasped his hand to his head. He stared wildly at the paper, his face paling with deep emotion.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DUPE GAINS LIGHT

Alexander Leland had just left police headquarters. He had gone there to confirm the report that Charles Davidson had escaped, and he had found it true. An officer was responsible for his escape. The officer told a reasonable story of being overpowered under trying circumstances, but it had not proved satisfactory to his superiors. He had been placed under arrest on suspicion of having been bribed to liberate the prisoner.

Rattlefoot was at large.

There was much scurrying to and fro by detectives to recapture the accused man, and a general alarm had put every patrolman within the city limits on the watch.

It was believed that Charles would not long be free.

When it was announced to Hugh Davidson, in Alexander's hearing, that Rattlefoot had gained liberty, the former had not stayed to gloat over and threaten the detective. He had hurried off, and Leland was left to follow his own course unmolested.

He, too, resolved to look well to every-

body he saw, seeking to sight the fugitive, yet, really, he left the capture of the man chiefly to others. He had enough to do without undertaking to give all his time to that matter.

With Theodore menaced with arrest, or, for all he knew, already captured, he had need to hurry on the elucidation of the Oliver murder mystery. In his own mind he thought the matter about solved, but he needed to close up the gaps in the evidence.

After a period of activity he made his way home to rest for the rest of the night, but when he arrived he found a note from George Gray awaiting him. The note proper had only these words:

"Come to the house. I want you. You may be needed."

It was not very satisfactory, but any kind of a message from Elias Warrington's residence was enough to start Alexander. He went without delay.

It was old George himself who admitted him. Since his confession the aged servant had lost a part of his haggard look, but he seemed worried enough now. That he was glad to see the detective was very plain.

"What's up, Mr. Gray?" asked Alexander.

"Sh!" replied George, laying his finger on his lips. "Don't talk here! Come with me!"

He led the way up-stairs, and as they went, Leland was impressed by the fact that there were unusual sounds in the house. They seemed to proceed from Elias Warrington's own room, and the detective grew more than interested. He was eager to hear what George had to say.

Not until they were in an upper room, with closed doors and utter isolation, did the old servitor open his mouth. Then he gravely turned to his companion.

"Have you heard the news, sir?"

"What news?" Alexander inquired.

"Mr. Warrington has met with a serious accident."

"An accident? What sort?"

"He was out driving, and the horses ran away. The coachman was not equal to the emergency, and both he and the master were thrown out of the carriage to the pavement. The man escaped severe injury, but Mr. Warrington was not so lucky. He is badly hurt."

"How badly?"

"Well, sir, I'm afraid there is no hope for him."

"What do the doctors say?"

"They cannot yet tell how it will go. They look serious when they say it, sir."

"What is the injury?"

"Chiefly internal, they say, sir; but what I am afraid of is—"

"What?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Warrington can't move, and he suffers much from his back. The doctors feel of the spine a good deal, and then they look grave. I believe the spinal column is broken."

"Surely, the doctors should be able to tell as to that."

"But they don't, or can't, or won't, sir. Maybe it's a fracture, not a clean break—I don't know much of such things, sir. Anyhow, I fear the worst."

"Why have you called me?"

"I thought you ought to know how bad he is."

"Quite right. What is his frame of mind?"

"Calm as the obelisk in Central Park, sir. He has wonderful nerve, sir."

"Do you think I could get in to see him?"

"Not now, sir. The doctors have ordered that nobody be admitted. The trained nurse is there, and I go in to do things, but even Mrs. Gordon is not admitted to the room, sir."

The detective meditated. If Elias Warrington was fatally injured it put a new face on the case. Warrington, dead, could tell nothing of the events so interesting to Alexander. Warrington, dying, might possibly be made to refer to the past.

He studied to see if he could devise any plan by which he could gain entrance to

the room. If he was there he could see how badly the man was injured, and what mood he was in, and, if need be, could press his claims against him.

While he hesitated there was a stir in the next room and old George held up a warning finger. There was a moment of silence, and then two voices sounded, one after the other.

"Now let me hear what new assault you would make on my endurance."

"I am going to give you proof of all I have alleged."

"Impossible!"

"It is true."

Alexander recognized the speakers. They were Persis Gordon and her nephew, Maurice Everton. He made a motion to Gray, and then stood ready to listen further. Old George shook his head, but he said nothing.

"I will hear you," coldly replied Persis.

"I can prove that Charles Davidson was deceiving you from the first. He paid attention to you with a base motive; he cajoled, flattered, played with you to further his ends."

"You have claimed that before."

"This time I offer you proof. I can produce witnesses to prove that—Aunt Persis, it is painful for me to say it—he made sport of you to his friends, who knew of his being with you so much. He said to them that he had an end to gain; he commented on the fact that you were older than himself; he even sneered at your personal looks. Even more, I can prove that he had a ticket purchased to leave New York and go far away—if he could succeed in some mysterious purpose—perhaps you know what it was?"

Maurice spoke rapidly, and evidently with deep pity for his aunt, and her voice was not clear as she replied:

"And you expect me to believe this?"

"Witnesses will swear to it."

"Perjured witnesses, no doubt."

"Aunt Persis, will you not believe? Don't you see that he deceived you, and intended to flee from the city—"

"I'll not believe it!" she declared. "He is a good man; he has been belied. Your witnesses would ruin him!"

"Aunt, do you know Davidson's handwriting?"

"Very well."

"Read this letter."

There was a sound of rustling paper, a pause, and then a woman's cry of mental pain broke upon Alexander's ears. Another pause, and then a cry again, this time of anger.

"Faded rose! Motherly dame! My ancient sweetheart! Wrinkled fairy! Old scarecrow!" He calls me this in the letter—he dares to call me this!"

"Aunt Persis, I would have spared you—"

"Wretched boy! would you have kept the truth from me? Would you have allowed me to go on thus blindly?"

"I did not know what to do—"

"I shall know!" cried Persis, fiercely. "I shall be avenged if I live. Wrinkled fairy, am I? Old scarecrow, am I? That's what he called me in his own writing, when he was pouring honey into my ears. Yes, it's his writing, I could swear to it. Oh! blind, blind fool that I was! Why couldn't I see? Why didn't I heed the warning of those who had my interests at heart? Wrinkled fairy! Old scarecrow! He shall see that the scarecrow can show claws and teeth! I will be revenged!"

Persis was mad with the humiliation and anger that beset her. She had been touched in the weakest part of her woman's heart. Ridiculed by the man she had loved and trusted. It was more than she could bear.

"Aunt Persis," pursued Maurice, "if you would tell more of the night when Richard Oliver was killed; if you would say who did the deed, it would be—"

"Do I know? Impudent boy! I know nothing!"

"What purpose did Charles Davidson have in seeking to cajole and deceive you? He had some selfish end—"

"I will not tell you!" exclaimed Mrs.

Gordon, hotly. "I will say nothing, do nothing until I have been revenged on that villain!"

She rushed wildly from the room. Alexander took a forward step and then paused.

"No!" he murmured. "The time is not ripe; I will not try to see her now. I will watch, instead. She will seek Rattlefoot; I'll watch!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FUGITIVE AND HIS FOES.

Central Park, at an early hour of the morning and the wildest part of the enclosure. The sun quivered upon tree, bush and vine, but at that point, the birds furnished the only visible sign of life. Mankind seemed, outwardly, to have deserted the vicinity.

Appearances were deceptive. Two men were ensconced in a thicket, and they were Alexander Leland and Teddy Tiernan. They looked out of their covert and seemed to watch for somebody.

"Sure, an' w'ot if the business goes wrong?" asked Teddy. "He may not come."

"I think he will."

"Wouldn't we have done better to have watched the house?"

"We didn't; that's all. Besides, suppose he don't come? I have men ready to pounce upon him, if he takes another course."

"I was after forgettin' av that. I guess we have Misther Rattlefoot on the hip av us."

Alexander was silent, but Teddy was not satisfied to be still.

"Do yez think Miss Persis Gordon has found out where he is, too?"

"Hard to say. Her theory as to where the escaped prisoner might be hiding led us to that vicinity. We went further than we know she went, and found him; but she may have advanced further on her mission of vengeance than we are aware of now. Time will prove."

"It's sorry I am for that woman. That scoundrel has broke the heart av her. I suppose she is now home w'd a sore feelin' in her gentle bosom, an' all on account—"

"Hush!"

Down the driveway that was near at hand came a cab. Close to the waiting men the driver halted and leaped to the ground.

"That's him," added Teddy. "Be yez sure he's trustworthy? He has Rattlefoot's money."

"And mine. I saw him after Hugh Davidson did, and I paid him more than Hugh. Besides, though he is a bullet-headed young fellow, I am sure he is honest and likely to be faithful. I presume—Hush!"

Again Alexander sounded a caution. Along a foot-path near the drive a man came with quick, springy steps. He was neatly dressed, wore a business suit and tall hat, and carried a cane in his hand.

"Rattlefoot!" whispered the detective.

"Why, this feller has a beard—"

"False! Don't you see he's disguised? That's Rattlefoot! Now, make ready to leap out and seize him—"

"Say, there are three or four other men!"

"Zounds! I believe they are really with him, though they keep remote. Can it be he has them for a guard? They look like rough customers. Has Hugh furnished them to protect Charles?"

"I'll bet the socks av me he has!"

"Then prepare to fight. Hush! Say no more! Rattlefoot will hear us."

The escaped prisoner, for it was, indeed, Charles Davidson, arrived close to them. He looked at the cabman.

"Are you Jack Collins?" he asked.

"That's my name," replied the cabman.

"I am your fare. Take me north of the Harlem River as soon as possible."

Rattlefoot moved forward to enter the vehicle, but just then a man burst forth from the bushes and confronted him. It was Maurice Everton, and he looked angry and belligerent.

"Stop!" he cried.

Davidson turned his gaze upon him.

"So it is you?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is I."

"Why do you want me to stop?"

"You are not to go in that cab. You are wanted elsewhere."

"Where? By whom?"

"Enough that it is as I say."

Maurice looked back as if he expected somebody else, but Davidson waited for no more. Maurice's hesitation and his manner told that he was an enemy.

"Out of my way!" the fugitive exclaimed. "Driver, up to your box. We will be off!"

He made a forward movement, but Maurice still kept in his way.

"Stop!" he ordered.

"I tell you, out of my way!"

"I will not! Traitor, double-dealer and scoundrel, your day is over! You will stay to meet justice—to meet the indignation of an injured woman. You shall not go!"

"Out of the way, I say!"

Rattlefoot caught Maurice's arm and tried to push him aside.

"I will not let you go!" persisted the young man.

"Then take that!"

As he spoke the fugitive struck out lustily and his fist caught Everton under the chin. Maurice fell heavily.

All this had been seen by Alexander Leland, and he would surely have thought that the time had come for him to interfere, but at that moment he saw Persis Gordon hurrying toward the spot. Nobody else appeared to have seen her, and the detective was quite willing she should have speech with her faithless lover. Something might come of it that would help the case.

"Driver, get me away from here!" now cried Rattlefoot.

The cabman stood with his whip in hand. He looked stolidly at his employer.

"I don't think I'll do it!" he answered.

"What?"

"I have changed my mind. I will not take you north of the Harlem!"

"What! do you break your word?"

"I do just that little trick, boss!"

"Rascal! But others will drive me. Men, seize this fellow and knock the senses out of him."

The rough-looking persons who had followed the escaped prisoner did not hesitate. With one accord they moved on the driver. It was big odds, but he was full of courage. He sprang to the cover of the trees that fringed the driveway and shouted:

"Try the game if you want to?"

The challenge was accepted, and they assailed him in concert, but he used his heavy whip as a club and gave them lusty blows that kept them off for the time.

Rattlefoot was worried. Maurice had struggled to his elbow, and, though he seemed weak, there was danger plainly to be seen.

"This way, one of you men!" shouted Rattlefoot. "Need a friend."

"Take me, Charles Davidson!"

A woman's voice sounded at his side, and the fugitive wheeled abruptly. Persis Gordon stood at his elbow.

"Here is your friend!" she added, intensely.

Her hands were clinched, her frame quivered with emotion, and her worn face was full of shame, grief and indignation; but the latter predominated, and it was clear she was an uncompromising enemy then.

Rattlefoot put out one hand as if to ward her off. Terror had seized upon him, and his eyes seemed about to leap out of their sockets.

"You here?" he gasped.

"Yes, I am here! The avenger has come!" she exclaimed.

"You—you! They told me you were turned against me; that you were hunting to do me injury—You here!"

"Yes, here for justice—here for revenge! Oh, coward, traitor, villain, I know all now. I have your own letters ridiculing me, I know all. Yes, and I am now your bitter enemy. I will stop you from your escape—I will bring you to justice—I will have revenge!"

The fugitive rallied.

"If that's your mood I have something to say. Woman, let me alone or I will do you deadly injury!"

Alexander Leland appeared from the thicket.

"I, too, am here!" he exclaimed. "Rattlefoot, you are my prisoner again. I arrest you in the name of law."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DETECTIVE BOLD BID

It was an early hour the next morning. Alexander Leland was alone in his room, but a close watch on outside happenings, and an illy-concealed impatience told that he was expecting something or some one. The "some one" came in the person of a middle-aged man who had a very professional look. He was the detective to whom casual reference has before been made as Alexander's helper.

No sooner was he in the room than Leland tersely questioned:

"What have you learned?"

"I have, at last, solved the identity of Perkins, your one-time shadower."

"Who is he? What is he?"

"An amateur detective of the private variety. I call him an amateur because, though he has before acted in this capacity, his work has been fitful through several years. Doubtless, he never showed ability enough to make him a regular."

"What more?"

"He has all along been an ally of Private Detective Parsons."

"Then our theories have been correct?"

"Yes, Parsons set him to shadow your block, where he was seen by yourself and Theodore."

"Anything more?"

"It was to Parsons that the chambermaid gave the piece of cloth fished out of your stove."

"He is at liberty to use it as he sees fit. I feel that our case is about won. Last night I told you how suspicion had pointed to Theodore. I felt then that I need no longer fear for my brother; I still believe it. Rattlefoot is guilty, I am sure, though I know not just how things happened at Warrington's. I don't understand Warrington's connection—his going to Oliver's room just before the deed was done."

"Have you seen the dealer who alleged that he sold the fatal knife to a blond young man?"

"I have, and the story falls to the ground. Parsons talked him into telling it, but the dealer weakened when once more alone. He had sold knives. He cannot remember to whom, nor will he assert that he sold one to a man who looked like Theodore."

"But did he sell to Rattlefoot?"

"No. I have learned just where Rattlefoot did get his knife, and the net is fast about him."

Alexander was silent for a moment; then he slowly added:

"Last night I expressed to you the belief that Elias Warrington poisoned my father. I think I shall have to acquit him of that charge; I have seen the physician who doctored my father, and he declares that death was purely from natural causes. He is a reputable doctor, and I cannot doubt him. He also explained just what the meaning of the red-tinged bottle was upon which Josh Rockaway laid so much stress. As far as I know there is no cause to think that Warrington hastened my father's end."

"And the belief that he wronged Edward Leland out of his money?"

"Is still as strong as ever!" declared Alexander, his eyes flashing. "I know he did it. Still, can it be proven? Warrington is desperately ill; I believe he will die. Will he go with his guilty secret untold?"

"Shall you do nothing to make him speak?"

Alexander rose with considerable excitement.

"I shall see him this very morning. I shall accuse him; I shall wrest his secret from him, if possible. I am sure there was once a receipt that he signed. You have seen the rough draft. There was a copy, I am sure, and it was signed.

Where is it now? Will it ever be found? I fear not, unless Warrington has it, and weakens in his villainy. I am about at my wits' end."

He paced the room with nervous steps. The man was rising above the detective in this crisis.

"I wish you success," murmured his associate.

"I shall go to Warrington," added Alexander, "and put the screws upon him. No doctor shall keep me out of his room. I shall speak to him quietly, but if he is stubborn, I shall put the screws upon him. He will be asked to explain why he entered Captain Oliver's room that fatal night."

"It is odd, but he must have hired Rattlefoot to do the deed."

"Remember that James Black, the servant, has confessed what I all along suspected, that he—Black—secretly admitted Rattlefoot, on that night. Black was bribed; he let Rattlefoot in. He admits it."

"Then Warrington's connection is obscure."

"Well, Rattlefoot is back in a cell at police headquarters, and that's the chief feature."

"You bear some marks of the struggle in the Park."

"Rattlefoot had a gang of hard-fighters along with him, but Teddy Tiernan, Maurice Everton and the cabman, with myself, sufficed to beat them finally. As you say, they left some marks on my face. Rattlefoot was also marked in the same place. Persis Gordon fell upon him, scratched him freely, and showered bitter speeches upon him."

"Queer that she will not make a full statement."

"It will come later. She has a feeling of guilt about something; I know not what. In time she will explain all."

Alexander walked to the table, picked up his hat and placed it on his head.

"I am going to Warrington's now," he pursued.

"I wish you success, Leland; I do, with all my heart."

Alexander reached out, took his companion's hand and wrung it warmly.

"This is the fight of the man, not the detective!" he remarked, in an unsteady voice. "There is much at stake. I am weak now; I think the iron will return to my nature when I see Warrington."

The two men went out together and walked a short distance. Then they separated, and Alexander went on alone to the house where the final struggle was to be made.

When he rung Warrington's bell the door was opened by old George Gray. The detective entered.

"How is your master?" he asked.

"Bad, sir, bad! The doctors have confessed that he will not live, and they have even told him so, sir."

"Go to him and say that I wish to see him."

"But the doctors say nobody is to go in, sir."

"At this stage of affairs doctors become of minor importance, Mr. Gray. Oblige me by doing as I say."

Old George shook his head. He did not believe anything good would come of it, but he went as directed. He was not gone many seconds. He came back looking surprised.

"Mr. Warrington will see you, sir."

The nurse came out, and, when Alexander crossed the threshold, he found himself alone with Elias Warrington.

The injured man lay in bed. Alexander's first impression was that illness had changed the man's expression perceptibly. Elias no longer had his bland look, but his eyes peered keenly and sharply out from under his brows. It was he who opened the conversation, and his voice was shrill and none too amiable.

"Skip all comments on my condition, sir! I have been injured. My spine is a wreck. I shall die; the doctors tell me so. Don't express regret or—joy!"

There was a strange mixture of bitterness and cunning in the close of his speech, and his eyes seemed to get keener

as he uttered the final word that implied so much.

"To business," he added, after a brief pause. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Warrington," answered Alexander, coming to the point as directly as could be wished. "I want to speak to you of my father, Edward Leland, and your connection with him."

"Humph! Old grain to be rethreashed. Grain? Bah! It's only chaff!" sneered Elias.

"You knew my father. He gave you twenty-two thousand dollars to invest for him. I have tried to have you pay the money to me which you never paid to him. I have asked only justice; I ask no more now. You have denied that you ever had money from him, but it is a fact that you did. Mr. Warrington, you say your doctors have told you that you must die, will you not do justice before the end comes?"

"Justice!"

"Even so."

"Hand my money over to you?"

"No. I ask only what is my own. I do not even ask for the interest of ten years. You have no especially near relative, I am told. What better can you do, with so much money to leave to somebody not near to you, than to do what is right?"

"Bosh! I never had a dollar from Edward Leland."

"Then what do you make of this paper? Read, but be careful that you don't try to destroy it."

Alexander quickly passed over the paper which Aola Oliver had brought to him from her father's chest. Elias read without change of countenance. If he was surprised he did not show it.

"What rubbish is this?" he demanded.

"A promise on your part to pay Edward Leland twenty-two thousand dollars."

"But not signed!"

"There was a duplicate that was signed."

"Produce it!"

"That I cannot now do. I haven't it to produce. Still, sir, you know the justice of this claim. Be honorable. Do you fear that it will injure your reputation? No, for I will never reveal the fact that you have so long unjustly held the money back. But if you decline to do what is right, I shall carry my case to court, and then—then your reputation will be ruined."

"Reputation!"

Alexander had spoken with vehemence, but Warrington's single word came in with scornful unconcern. Then he hesitated, meditated and more slowly added:

"I don't care a rap for reputation when I am dead. Do as you please, sir. Without the signed paper you cannot collect a penny. You never will collect a penny. I refuse the demand, absolutely and permanently. Not a dollar do you get from me!"

His stubborn declaration brought the crisis.

"Very well, sir; then I will proceed to other business. I hereby arrest you as the murderer of Captain Richard Oliver. I can prove that you entered his room not more than five minutes before he was killed. The facts are patent to all. I arrest you; you are the murderer!"

Warrington's expression changed.

"Eh?—eh? What's that?" he exclaimed.

"I think I was plain, sir."

"Accuse me of Oliver's murder?"

"I do, sir. You spoke falsely about that night. You asserted that you were not in his room at all. I can prove that you went there just before the murder. I accuse you of killing Oliver. I arrest you!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DEED DONE AT NIGHT.

Alexander had played his trump card. He did not believe that Elias Warrington struck the blow that took Captain Dick Oliver's life, but there were things that needed explaining, and the direct accusation had foundation enough to make the charge full of import. More, he hoped it would take effect.

Elias looked dazed for a moment, and

his eyes wavered and twitched, but his cunning was not gone.

"A trick!" he exclaimed. "A device to frighten me! It will not work; you do not get my money in this way. I never had a cent from Edward Leland; I will not pay a cent to his son. Bah! your claim is absurd. You can't prove it!"

"But I can!"

It was a speaker other than the two in conference, and a third man flung the half-open door wider open and rushed into the room. Alexander quickly looked around.

"Theodore!" he exclaimed, startled.

"Yes, it is I!" cried the younger Leland. "I, the son of our wronged father, am here. I, too, have something to say. Elias Warrington says you cannot prove our claim. I can! Here, here is the receipt which shows that Warrington owed the twenty-two thousand dollars to our father. Here, here is the proof."

Wildly excited, Theodore poured forth the words swiftly, and before the two men he waved a slip of paper. Warrington, for the first time, looked worried, but Alexander snatched at the paper eagerly.

"The promissory note, the promissory note!" repeated Theodore, loudly. "Found, at last!"

The detective was reading audibly.

"This is to certify that I, Elias Warrington, of the City and County of New York, speculator, have this day received of Edward Leland, of the same New York, gentleman, the sum of twenty-two thousand dollars, and that I am to invest the same for him to the best of my judgment; and that the schooner 'Grayhound' is the medium of trade from which gain is expected. Now, therefore, I, the said Elias Warrington, do promise to pay to the said Edward Leland, his heirs or assigns, the sum of twenty-two thousand dollars, with interest at six per centum, when the schooner 'Grayhound' returns to port, with one-half of all profits.

("Signed) ELIAS WARRINGTON.

"Nathan Maynard, Attorney-at-law, witness."

Warrington heard the last word, and then reached out his hand.

"Give it to me!" he ordered.

"Beware how you seek to destroy it!" cautioned the detective.

The sick man hastily scanned the paper; then he tossed it on the floor. He was angry, but not so much as might be expected.

"Done!" he admitted. "I can't deny that evidence. Young man"—here he turned to Theodore—"where did you get this paper?"

"From Nathan Maynard."

"The scoundrel swore he had destroyed it. He stole it from Edward Leland when the latter was ill," frankly added Elias, "and said he had burned it. I never felt really safe, though, but I believed Maynard was dead. Alive, is he? Where is the fellow?"

"Chance threw me into his company. I found him in a garret, crippled, bedridden, in rags and dirt, and passing under the name of Adam Smith. In his drunken mood he left old acquisitions unguarded. I found this paper; I secured it; I have it now. Brother Alexander, we can regain our own. Here is Warrington's promise to pay. It cannot be overthrown—our money will be recovered!"

The detective was dumfounded, but he had the wisdom to see that this was the time to strike further.

"More," he sternly exclaimed, "I have arrested Warrington for murdering Captain Oliver!"

Elias changed his gaze with swift impulse.

"Look you!" he cried, "I'll not have that crime fixed upon me; I am innocent. I'll tell the whole story of that night."

He gave nobody else chance to interrupt, but went on rapidly:

"I did go to Captain Oliver's room. He had made some threats against me, and had damaging papers—not of your affair, but of recent date. I determined to have them. I prevailed upon him by specious words to sleep in my house. I put him in

a room the door of which could not be locked.

"When he was asleep I went softly up to rob him of the papers. You, Leland, say it was five minutes before the fatal blow was struck. I estimate it at ten, if you want exactness.

"I softly entered the room. Captain Oliver slept. I stole the papers I wanted—I said a few minutes ago that I cared not a rap for my future reputation. I confess the theft. It was successful; I am content with it.

"Now, as to what followed, I had barely secured the papers from his pocket when I heard footsteps in the hall. I had lighted the gas and turned it so it was burning dimly. I would have shut it off, but I had not the time. I crouched by the foot of the bed, the darkest point there.

"The door opened again. Two men entered. One was a tall, strongly built person with a reddish cast of hair. The other was slighter, with blond hair and a gray suit of clothes. More, the tall man moved with a firm, confident tread, while the one in gray reeled. He needed the support of his companion's arm, and he had it.

"Even then I noticed that this man in gray seemed hardly to know what he was doing. His eyes were fixed, and he moved like a rickety machine, urged on by his companion's hold.

"The larger man was the person called Rattlefoot. The other I could not recognize again, owing to the fact that I saw him less plainly. I only know he was a blond and wore gray.

"I was not seen by them, and the burning gas did not impress them as peculiar, it seemed. I should here use the word 'him.' The blond was too drunk to be impressed. It was Rattlefoot who did the looking and the thinking.

"The presence of a man in bed did seem to surprise him. Keeping his hold upon the blond, Rattlefoot drew nearer to the bed. He looked sharply at Captain Oliver, and appeared to be in doubt. Then he bent over Oliver, evidently to learn how deep his sleep was.

"It was at this moment that Oliver awoke. His eyes opened; he became instantly alert. He had been a sailor—with him action followed discovery, as a matter of course.

He flung out his hand; he seized Rattlefoot by the arm.

"Rattlefoot was startled, but the blond man was too drunk to know fear. He had been released, and he wobbled forward, bending over the bed, his hand outstretched as if seeking support.

"Thieves!" cried Captain Oliver. "I have you now!"

"Let me go!" hissed Rattlefoot.

"Never!" stoutly exclaimed the bold seaman. "I'll land you in prison, you knave!"

"He held fast, bound to make his threat good. Rattlefoot looked desperate. Suddenly I saw him draw a long, ugly knife from his pocket. He waited not a moment; he gave Oliver not a moment of grace, or chance for his life. He plunged the knife into the captain's breast.

"I saw the blood burst out—it came in a spurt; it seemed to strike fully upon the blond man, who, reeling, feeling for support, was still bending forward over the bed, and still reaching out an aimless hand. The red stream must have fallen on the blond man, I say.

"I saw the effect upon all. The sight, and the cry which burst from Oliver's lips, seemed to appeal to the drunken man. His dull expression gave way to one of horror; his half-closed eyes opened wide. He started back, frightened, filled with terror, his mind regaining a measure of intelligence at least.

"Rattlefoot knew what he had done, and he tried to break away. He tried in vain. Oliver was a man of great strength, naturally, and it had not then gone. He tightened his hold and shouted for help, while he clung so tenaciously to his assassin.

"I had been chilled by the terrible events that had followed far more swiftly than my elaborate story seems to show, and I was appalled by the cowardly deed,

But, above all, I saw that the house would be aroused, and that, if I remained there, the chance was good for me to be entangled in the web of crime. Be that as it might, I had no good excuse for being in Captain Oliver's room.

"I turned and glided quickly and silently out of the room, aided by my position and the attention everybody else was giving to the terrible drama before me. It was thus that I escaped being seen by them. Not one of the three suspected I was there, or had been there.

"Swiftly and silently I ran down to my own room. I entered, locked the door and waited for the cries to bring help to Captain Oliver. It was at that moment that I heard somebody rush out of the house. I took a flying look at him from the front window—it was the man in gray, and the horror implanted on his face was impressive.

"I need not dwell on what followed. Help came to Oliver in the form of the servants and Everton, but the fatal blow—the only one given, you know—had long been delivered, and in my sight.

"Now, why didn't I tell this at the start? Simply because I could do it only by confessing that I had been in Oliver's room, and that was something I didn't want to tell. As I am dying it don't matter now.

"I am ready to swear to the fact that Rattlefoot killed Oliver, and that all is as I have stated here."

Elias Warrington finished his story. It had been listened to by the Leland brothers with painful interest, but, as it went on, it brought relief, and Theodore's face was full of thanksgiving. He was saved; he was free from all blame. Elias had not recognized him, but he was proven innocent. The law would never touch him seriously, and his conscience would not sting him more. He had not slain Captain Oliver.

Before either of the brothers could speak there was a rustling sound behind them. They turned; Persis Gordon stood there. Her face was full of satisfaction.

"I have heard this story," she spoke, in a thick voice. "I rejoice, and I will add what is needed to the proof against Rattlefoot: I can tell why he was there. In his hearing I chanced to speak of old family diamonds possessed by Mr. Warrington, and fabulously valuable. The story made Charles Davidson mad to get them. It was then he began his treacherous attentions to me.

"He flattered and hoodwinked me until he had me in his net. Then he sprung the idea that, now, I know was in his mind from the first. He asked me to admit him secretly to the house at night. I refused. He found somebody else more willing to let him in.

"As much as I cared for him, I had a vague fear as to the diamonds, and it was this that led me to speak falsely to him as to their exact keeping-place. I told him, wrongfully, that they were in that room where, as fatal chance would have it, Captain Oliver had been put to sleep the night that Davidson happened to come.

"The diamonds caused all this, while my master has—Why, Mr. Warrington has fainted."

It was true. Utterly wearied out by his long explanation, Elias had fallen into unconsciousness, and his heavy breathing alarmed them.

"A doctor!—a lawyer!" exclaimed Alexander. "We must have him revived at once, and we must secure his sworn statement of all this."

The detective turned away to seek the hall, but Theodore grasped his hand. The younger brother faced his elder with tears gathering in his eyes. His voice trembled as he spoke:

"I am saved, saved! I am innocent!"

"Brother," Alexander feelingly replied, "the last doubt is gone. You are saved, and from more than this accusation. Your manhood is reclaimed, and you need not fear to take your place among honored men now."

The case was over, and, in due time, Charles Davidson paid the penalty of his crime. Before he died he confessed all,

and said that he took his intoxicated companion of the fatal night into the house with him because he thought he could be left, there, asleep, and thus accused of the robbery as the only visible intruder.

James Black received a slight term in prison. Hugh Davidson got a longer one, for Alexander had not forgotten the assault on South Street. Minor evil-doers were seen to and punished.

Elias Warrington lived but a few days after his confession. It was a curious coincidence that Nathan Maynard, his former tool, lay in the old garret suffering about the same way as his master, but not so severely. Nathan still lives and sings his favorite song.

Persis Gordon has left New York, but Aola still lives in her old home. Time has softened the blows that each received. Teddy still keeps his stand, and Josh Rockaway is on the ocean.

Alexander and Theodore recovered their money from Warrington's estate, and prosperity is theirs. Theodore's reformation is complete, and he is honored by all who know him.

THE END.

NEXT!

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